THE SKELETON KEY

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FADE IN:

A LANDSCAPE, BEYOND A WINDOW

A crooked oak tree, laden with Spanish moss, with branches swaying in the breeze.

CAROLINE (O.S.)
I lost no time, of course, in telling my mother all that I knew, and perhaps I should have told her long before, and we saw ourselves at once in a difficult and dangerous position.

AN OLD MAN

lies in an institutional bed. Wisps of white hair, a sunken face, skin taut against bones. He stares outside...

CAROLINE (O.S.)
Some of the man's money -- if he had any -- was certainly due to us; but it was not likely that our captain's shipmates, above all the two specimens seen by me, Black Dog and the blind beggar, would be inclined to give up their booty in payment of the dead man's debts.

TO THE LANDSCAPE

...across the room, beyond the window. As a new sound rises: the branches RUSTLING from the wind outside.

CAROLINE (O.S.)
The captain's order to mount at once and ride for Doctor Livesey would have left my mother alone and unprotected, which was not to be thought of.

THE OLD MAN'S GAZE

sharpens slightly, with the aural shift. The exterior WIND rises...as the man's breathing slows...

CAROLINE (O.S.)
Indeed, it seemed impossible for either of us to remain much longer in the house...

WHILE THE TREES OUTSIDE

sway, the wind stronger now. ANGLE CLOSES, on the tree's branches, Spanish moss trailing like gossamer strands...

CAROLINE (O.S.)
...for the fall of coals in the kitchen grate, the very ticking of the clock, filled us with alarms...

...while the lulling, restless breeze gets louder, now DROWNING OUT the voice. It's as if we've moved outside. Hearing only the trees, the winds, some birds--

REVEAL INT. BEDROOM - DAY

--and suddenly silence.

CAROLINE ELLIS, 25, casually pretty, a gentle toughness about her, is at the man's bedside, reading softly from her dog-eared copy of "Treasure Island":

CAROLINE
...and it occurred to us at last to go forth together and seek help in the neighboring hamlet. No sooner said than done. Bare-headed as we were, we ran out at once in the gathering evening and the frosty fog.

Caroline glances up. And then stops reading. The elderly man's eyes are now closed.

She studies his chest with worry. Then sets the book aside, rises and takes his hand. Feels for a pulse.

Heart heavy, she turns to the door, revealing it's an institutional space. A NURSE passes in a hall beyond--

CAROLINE
I'm sorry...Audrey?
(the nurse stops)
Mr. Talcott's gone.

INT. HOSPICE OFFICE - DAY

A heavy-set black NURSE is at her desk, on the phone:

DESK NURSE
Hiya, this is Gail over at the hospice. You got the honors for a William Talcott? Mmm-hmm. Time to get the man packing.

INT. PATIENT'S ROOM

A bodybag is unzipped. A toetag gets tied. A catheter bag unhooked. A medical bracelet snipped off. Two young MORTUARY WORKERS prepare to transfer the corpse--

MORTUARY WORKER
Ready and -- lift!

Caroline's at the doorway, shown paperwork by an OFFICIAL:

HOSPICE OFFICIAL
Print and sign at the bottom there. Again there. Then sign and date--

OLDER NURSE
Excuse me, I'll do that, thank you.

Another nurse edges Caroline aside, smiling perfunctorily:

OLDER NURSE
She's not staff.

INT. PATIENT'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

NURSING ASSISTANTS are busy. The bodybag sits on its gurney. SHEETS are stripped. TRASH is bagged. A VACUUM blares.

Caroline waits by the door as a CNA empties drawers, tossing junk into a box labeled "William Talcott - Personal Effects." Baseball cards, "Treasure Island," homemade music tapes, etc. The CNA foists the box off on Caroline:

CNA
Front desk. 'Case anyone shows.

INT. MORTUARY VAN

Loading doors are opened and the workers slide the bodybag gurney inside. It BANGS to a halt; the doors are SHUT. Footsteps, laughter fade away. Leaving darkness and silence.

INT. HOSPICE OFFICE

DESK NURSE
Hiya, this is Gail over at the hospice. Is this Mr. Womack? Mr. Womack, I'm calling with good news. Some space just opened up for your dear mother. Fine piece of real estate -- room with a view.

INT. LOBBY

Caroline sits alone, with the "William Talcott" box. Waiting. She's looking at his possessions -- music tapes, a photo booth's 4-shot strip of a younger, wilder Mr. Talcott, and a guitar-shaped key chain emblazoned "*Live Fast, Die Young.*" She smiles at the irony as the Desk Nurse passes:

DESK NURSE
You expecting someone?

CAROLINE
Whoever's coming for Mr. Talcott.

DESK NURSE
You'll be waiting awhile, hon.

CAROLINE
Didn't we call? He said he had family.

DESK NURSE
Yeah, out west. They don't want nothing to do with him. All his arrangements were already made.
(shrugs)
That's the one good thing about dying. You ain't around to see the world forget.

CAROLINE
But...what about...

She indicates the box of the man's possessions.

DESK NURSE
Ashes to ashes, dust to dust, hon.
(shrugs)
You can dump it out back.

EXT. HOSPICE BUILDING - DAY

A back alley. Caroline opens a dumpster to see GARBAGE BAGS, and among them, some other boxes of patients' possessions. Labeled "Personal Effects"...of "Margaret Cleary," "Alice Hunsecker" and "Samuel Dubois." Ragged and forlorn.

She regards the box in her own hands, for "William Talcott." All the odds and ends that had meaning to him, that reflected his character, that made up a life...

CAROLINE
Tell you what, Mr. Talcott...

She lets the dumpster slam, securing the box under her arm:

CAROLINE
Stick with me.

EXT. DOWNTOWN NEW ORLEANS - DAY

A Garden District streetcar rolls through faded city streets.

INT. STREETCAR - DAY

Caroline rides with the Talcott box beside her, listening to headphones, reading the classified ads labeled "Hospice". She circles one, underlining "$1000/wk" with some interest...

...as the streetcar passes a CEMETERY, row after row of above-ground crypts. The car slows to a stop as she resumes her reading. The door across from her opens--

--but no one enters or exits. Caroline stares at the open door, even with the open cemetery gates.

As if it opened for her alone...as MUSIC now rises, into--

INT. NEW ORLEANS CLUB - NIGHT

Where a DJ spins away, mixing a BLUES TUNE with DRUM-AND-BASS for a dancing downtown crowd. Among them is Caroline, dancing her heart out. With her is JILL DUPAY, 26, her black and flirty roommate -- smiling as she fends off the attention of some suitors... while Caroline lets it all hang out...

...dancing away like there's no tomorrow...

AT THE BAR - MOMENTS LATER

Caroline and Jill shove through the crowd, laughing together--

CAROLINE
Okay, hang on, I think I've got one for you. Real slow, no sudden movements. Nine o'clock...
(Jill takes a glance)
Whaddya think? Got potential?

JILL
Ever meet a guy who was anything more?

CAROLINE
He is looking...our...way--

JILL
It's either my way or your way. There is no <u>our</u> way.

They reach the bar, as Jill takes another look at the CUTE GUY in the corner. She turns back, mutters--

JILL
Damn. Your way.

As a handsome BARTENDER arrives to greet them--

BARTENDER
Hey -- Caroline! Haven't seen you in forever! Checking out the DJ's?

CAROLINE
No, I've got a new thing going. This guy's good, though--

JILL
She's chasing a <u>real</u> job. A <u>career</u>.

BARTENDER
Oh, man. That's terrible.

CAROLINE
Yeah, isn't it? Two Cuervos, two Coronas. Maybe I'll come to my senses.

The bartender smiles, off to get their drinks. Caroline surveys the crowd, grooving to the music. Jill studies her:

JILL
Yeah, maybe you will.

CAROLINE
I was kidding.

JILL
You just up and leave all this? 'Cause you'd rather spend your day with dead people?

CAROLINE
Dying.

JILL
Same difference.

CAROLINE
I can't get into nursing school till I get the volunteer hours first.

JILL
Well, there's lots of places you can get the hours. Clinics, hospitals... Y'know, some folks become nurses to help people get <u>better</u>.
(off Caroline's glare)
I'm just worried about you, that's all.

CAROLINE
No, you're worried about my share of the rent.

As their drinks arrive, Caroline takes a folded "Classified" ad from her pocket. The circled listing: *"SEEKING HOSPICE CAREGIVER. Terrebone Parish. Full-Time, Live-In, $1000/wk."*

CAROLINE
Have faith. I interview tomorrow.

JILL
A grand a week?! Whoa, wait -- Terrebone Parish -- that's the freaking swamps.

CAROLINE
I get my hours and get paid, and I'll be set to start school in the fall.

JILL
They have gators in the swamps. They have guys missing teeth.

CAROLINE
For a grand a week, I'll survive.

JILL
You should be where you belong -- with me. Fending them off.

She nods toward the dance floor. Caroline pockets her ad:

CAROLINE
So what's the story with Romeo? Still looking over here?

JILL
I'm serious.

Caroline sees she seems concerned...

JILL
It doesn't bring you down at all? This work you're doing? It's not changing you?

Caroline downs her shot and raises her beer bottle. Jill clinks it with her own. Caroline smiles:

CAROLINE
I'm twenty-five years old. What's wrong with a little change?

EXT. CITY OUTSKIRTS - DAWN

AN AERIAL TRACK as the sun glints off the never-ending swamps and inlets of Lake Pontchartrain...as a Honda Civic leaves the New Orleans skyline, speeding the bayou causeway west.

EXT. BAYOU ROADS - DAY

The Civic drives past moss-laden oaks and palmettos sprouting from the lush June swamps. Lonely towns and floating shacks dot the landscape -- cheap bayou hideaways. A sign reads "Entering Terrebonne Parish, Louisiana."

In the car, Caroline checks a map. The car keys in her ignition dangle from Mr. Talcott's guitar-shaped key chain...with its "*Live Fast, Die Young*"...

...as the Civic drives past a RAMSHACKLE GAS STATION. Where a wind-chime made of wishbones sways in the breeze.

EXT. BAYOU ESTATES - DAY

The scenery soon becomes less rural, more landscaped: large tree-lined lots -- some with gated entrances -- with long driveways curling to Reconstruction-era homes.

She stops at a pair of open IRON GATES. Checks directions.

CAROLINE
No way.

EXT. DEVEREAUX HOUSE - DAY

Through a CANOPY OF OAKS, a faded white plantation-style house appears. It's small for a mansion -- but built with small columns and galleries in grand local tradition.

Caroline's Civic follows the gravel drive to a circle at the front veranda, where a Ford Bronco is parked. Ivy vines creep up the house's exterior, in minor disrepair.

She steps out, surprised by the scale of it. Cicadas buzz. A summer breeze whispers. And as she approaches...

...we follow her in reflection...as ANGLE CREEPS INTO her car's driver-side MIRROR...

INT. DEVEREAUX HOUSE

Caroline steps through the open front door to a large foyer, with an arcing staircase. A dusty chandelier hangs above. A faded painting of St. Peter on the wall. The decor suggests an old-fashioned Southern sensibility.

CAROLINE
Hello?

There's no reply.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Antique furniture and a painting of St. Michael frame a wall of large windows overlooking the backyard. A grassy lawn and gardens slopes to the banks of a marshy bayou.

Near the water, an OLD WOMAN is giving a haircut to an OLD MAN in a wheelchair -- a tablecloth beneath his feet. She wears a kitchen apron. Faint SNIP-SNIPS from outside...

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
Now that right there is what love is all about.

She turns to see LUKE MARSHALL, 31, handsome in a dusty suit, carrying an overstuffed box of files.

LUKE
Old-fashioned devotion -- like you read about. You must be Caroline--

CAROLINE
Sorry I -- the door was open--

LUKE
Didn't hear you, it's a big house.

CAROLINE
Yeah. I'll say.

He smiles and starts toward her -- as his box's bottom SPLITS OPEN and documents spill to their feet. Luke sighs.

LUKE
So much for getting affairs in order.

He wipes off his dusty hand and offers it.

LUKE
Sorry -- Luke Marshall. I'm the estate lawyer. We spoke on the phone--

CAROLINE
Oh, right, hi.

LUKE
It's a service the firm provides. Docs figure a month, maybe. He's pretty far gone.

CAROLINE
I understand.

LUKE
His wife's having kind of a rough time with it.

CAROLINE
Most people do.

LUKE
(nods, regards her)
Caroline -- that's a nice name. From "carol," right? As in singing?

CAROLINE
I'm sorry -- is the interview with you or with Mrs. Devereaux?

LUKE
Oh, I'm just here to help.

CAROLINE
Help who?

Luke offers a hopeful smile.

LUKE
Listen, when I introduce you...let me do most of the talking.

EXT. BACK GARDENS - DAY

The Old Woman gathers up the tablecloth with the fallen hair, takes her jar of combs and scissors and heads for the house--

LUKE (O.S.)
Violet, you have a visitor.

--and sees Luke and Caroline approaching. She's VIOLET DEVEREAUX, 71, a grandmotherly, long-faded Southern belle.

LUKE
May I present Miss Caroline Ellis -- a volunteer with Hospice of New Orleans. Caroline, this is Violet Devereaux.

CAROLINE
It's a pleasure. You have a lovely home.

Caroline offers a smiling hand. Violet looks her over.

VIOLET
Hmmph.

And walks right past, into the house.

Luke sighs, leads Caroline on, toward the Old Man -- still in his wheelchair facing the swamp...

LUKE
I'm sorry, it's just hard -- the idea of a stranger living here--

CAROLINE
I understand. Really.

LUKE
She's old South, y'know? She thinks women still curtsy. Have you worked with hospice for long?

CAROLINE
Um, a little while--

LUKE
What'd you do before?

CAROLINE
Worked at some music clubs, a radio station. Scouting bands--

LUKE
Well, that's a switch.

CAROLINE
Yeah, I was...I was looking to do something a little more...
(shrugs modestly)
...meaningful.

LUKE
And music doesn't count? Maybe you're not listening to the right kind.

He offers a genuine smile, which she appreciates, as they reach BEN DEVEREAUX, 76, an emaciated wraith, bones brittle, face vacant. Totally still. Luke stays behind him:

LUKE
So here's the man of the hour--
(over-loud)
Ben, meet Miss Caroline Ellis!

The old man's eyes vaguely find Caroline's. His head doesn't turn. A sad and faraway look, slightly haunting.

CAROLINE
He can't talk at all?

LUKE
The stroke pretty much paralyzed him; he's just wasting away.

CAROLINE
Which side was affected?

LUKE
Both.

CAROLINE
(frowns)
Both?

LUKE
Happened a month ago. Up in the attic, that's where she found him.

Caroline takes Ben's left hand. It tremors steadily.

CAROLINE
Hello, Ben. I'm Caroline.

VIOLET (O.S.)
She's not right.

They turn to see Violet on the back steps, still in her kitchen apron but now with a cigarette.

VIOLET
I don't want her.

LUKE
Violet, you haven't even--

VIOLET
She's not from here. Look at her. She won't understand the house.

LUKE
She's from New Orleans!

VIOLET
Wasn't raised, though. Hear how she talks. Who knows <u>where</u> she--

CAROLINE
Hoboken, New Jersey.

VIOLET
Hmmph.

LUKE
What do you want, a Southern accent? You'll get used to it.

VIOLET
We liked the last girl better.

LUKE
You speaking for Ben, now? The last girl left, Violet. You know you need help with him--

VIOLET
She won't understand the house.

Case closed. She turns and goes. Luke throws up his hands, exasperated, with a sigh.

CAROLINE
So the last girl left, huh?

EXT. DEVEREAUX HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Caroline departs, heading for her car, as Luke protests--

LUKE
Wait, please, let me talk to her. Let me straighten things out--

CAROLINE
I can't help anyone who doesn't want me helping.

LUKE
She does want help. She's just scared.

CAROLINE
Of what? Politeness?

LUKE
He's the love of her life and he's going to die.

Caroline stops, key in the door. Luke makes his appeal:

LUKE
They've been together forever. She's losing her soulmate here. I don't know about you, but that'd probably put some sandpaper up my ass.

CAROLINE
Aren't you a romantic.

LUKE
I try.

CAROLINE
Keep at it.

LUKE
Look, the last girl quit, you're the fifth interview since -- she shoots down every one. It's not personal. You here means he's really dying.

CAROLINE
He's dying whether I'm here or not.

She glances to the house, and sees a curtain rustle closed in an upstairs window.

CAROLINE
What'd she mean about the house?

LUKE
What?

CAROLINE
She said I wouldn't understand the house. Why'd she say that?

LUKE
All I know is her checks clear.

He shrugs, then reads her look and gives up...

LUKE
Look, forget it. You're a real peach. If it makes you feel any better, I'm still looking for my dream job too.

He trudges back for the house. Caroline sighs...

CAROLINE
So if you talked to her, what would you say?

Luke stops in his tracks, with a hopeful turn...

LUKE
That she can look all she wants, but she won't find any better than you. So she'd do well to treat you like it.

Caroline glances back up to the closed window curtain.

CAROLINE
Well, would you tell her one other thing? For me?

LUKE
You name it.

CAROLINE
Tell her my salary just went up.

INT. CAROLINE & JILL'S APT. - DAY

Jill watches Caroline pack, in a funky bedroom with vintage rock tour posters. Shelves upon shelves of albums and CD's.

CAROLINE
So here's the rules while I'm away. You play any of my stuff, it goes back where you found it. Genre, band alphabetical, year of release. Bands that switch genres go on more than one shelf, not the same shelf.

JILL
What's the second rule?

CAROLINE
Just because my room has the nicer bed, doesn't mean your boyfriends are allowed in it.

EXT. APT. BLDG. - NEW ORLEANS - DAY

Caroline stuffs one large suitcase into her Honda Civic...

JILL
Okay, here's my rules, then: no knitting. No joining a bridge club. No playing bingo.

CAROLINE
Oh, good. Good rules.

JILL
I'm serious, Cary. They'll try to suck you into their elderly ways.

CAROLINE
It's less than an hour from here. I'll be back all the time.

JILL
Yeah, well, you better. Whenever you wanna talk to someone who wasn't around for World War Two.

CAROLINE
Jeez. What's with you and old people?

JILL
They terrify me.

She's straight-faced, then smiles. Caroline shuts the trunk and Jill gives her a heartfelt hug. Softly:

JILL
He'd be proud of you, Cary.
(off her look)
You know he would.

Caroline seems caught off-guard by this comment, whatever it means...so Jill spares her having to respond...

JILL
You be careful out there.

EXT. BAYOU COUNTRY - DUSK

The sun casts deep shadows as ANGLE SWEEPS through the scrub oaks, dripping with moss -- skirting the bayou and finding Caroline's Civic, headed back for Terrebonne Parish...

EXT. SMALL TOWN ROAD - DUSK

Caroline drives past a gypsy-dressed Caucasian BAYOU WOMAN, wearing sunglasses and tugging a covered wheelbarrow. A gangly BLACK GIRL walks with, holding her arm to guide.

Caroline notes the pair, then notes her empty gas gauge.

EXT. RAMSHACKLE GAS STATION - DUSK

Caroline pumps gas at a rundown general store. Somewhere unseen, a BABY is crying. She replaces the pump, grabs her wallet and enters the store...passing its wishbone chimes.

INT. STORE

At the screen door, she notes a trail of RED DUST crossing the doorway. Sparsely stocked shelves, buzzing flies. No one's behind the register. The CRYING baby is louder -- from a door left ajar to a stockroom hallway.

CAROLINE
Hello? I need to pay for some gas!

No answer. The baby's WAIL grows deafening. Unnerving her. She holds a $20 bill, steps toward the dark hall...

CAROLINE
Um...hello?!

The BAWLING continues, a SHRIEK now, as Caroline reaches the doorway...and then suddenly SILENCE.

Caroline takes a step back. Then puts her $20 bill on the counter and hurries out.

EXT. RAMSHACKLE GAS STATION

Caroline returns to her car...as the unseen CRYING resumes. Disturbed, she looks back to the store. No signs of life.

CAROLINE
Welcome to the neighborhood.

EXT. DEVEREAUX HOUSE - DUSK

Darkness falls as Caroline's Civic rolls in...

INT. DEVEREAUX HOUSE - CAROLINE'S ROOM - NIGHT

An vintage Hasselblad 500-C CAMERA is set on a side table, beside a photo of a blue-collar DAD with his arms around a 10-year old Caroline, dressed in rocker regalia like a too-young Madonna. The Dad holds the same camera in the photo.

Caroline regards it, then surveys her room: faded curtains and a four-poster bed. Small flowerpots. Her new home.

INT. ADJOINING BATHROOM

Caroline enters with some toiletries...and stops as she faces the sink. There's a medicine cabinet above -- but a small framed watercolor hangs where a mirror should be.

Caroline frowns. There's no mirror in the bathroom at all.

INT. LOWER HALL - NIGHT

Caroline walks the faded floral carpet, looking for--

CAROLINE
Mrs. Devereaux? I'm all unpacked!

She finds herself at the foyer, beside another open door to a bathroom. She leans inside and takes note.

There's no mirror in this bathroom either.

INT. UPPER LANDING/HALL - NIGHT

An antique-decorated hall, lit by wall sconces, runs the length of the house -- bisected at the staircase. At one end, a closed door is flanked by sconces gone out.

At the other end hangs a large painting of black swans in flight. Beside it, a bedroom door is open.

INT. BEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Caroline enters to see the old man in bed, wheelchair nearby. He's in near-darkness, staring into space. Delta blues MUSIC plays faintly on a vintage phonograph.

CAROLINE
Hi, Ben. Remember me? I'm gonna be staying with you...for awhile.
(steps to his bedside)
Not a lot of light in here for you.

The old man stays expressionless. She lifts his arms to tuck his blanket higher, taking his hand in hers--

CAROLINE
So you're a blues fan, huh? You know what, so was my...

--and suddenly finds she can't free her hand--

--because his hand GRIPS it tight. She jerks back, spooked, but he won't let go. He clutches fiercely...and his distant eyes meet hers. His grip stays resolute.

CAROLINE
Ben, hey -- ouch, what's the--

VIOLET (O.S.)
There you are.

Ben's grip releases. Caroline spins to see Violet entering with a tray -- a small mortar & pestle and a water glass.

VIOLET
It's time for his remedies now.
Scoot, child.
(edges her aside)
Pale, pale. So very pale.

She puts a hand to Ben's cheek, as if taking temperature.

VIOLET
Nine in the morning and nine at night. Takes his pills in a powder -- I'll show you where. Help him drink it down.

She pours the pestle's powder into the water glass, stirs it with a spoon. It clouds into silty gray.

CAROLINE
What's he taking?

VIOLET
Cipramil. Thins his blood. He has spasms sometimes, when he gets up his strength. Don't let 'em scare you.

She tips the glass to Ben's lips, holding a kerchief beneath. Then wipes his chin, kisses his forehead--

VIOLET
And a kiss to make it taste.

She smiles sadly, squeezes his hand. Caroline notices that this time Ben doesn't grip back.

Violet sighs, then looks Caroline up and down, appraising:

VIOLET
Scrawnier than I'd like. Pretty though. Bet you're all marked up, aren't you.

CAROLINE
Marked up?

VIOLET
Written on. You youngsters, you're always jabbin' yourselves with ink and needles. Written on, aren't you.

CAROLINE
Not where you can see.

Violet gives a grouchy look of distaste.

VIOLET
Hmmph.

INT. VIOLET'S ROOM - NIGHT

A DOOR opens, casting light onto an antique-furnished, four-poster bedroom. Musty but warm.

VIOLET (O.S.)
This here's my room, right 'cross the hall. You'll not be needed here and I'll respect your room the same.

INT. UPPER HALL

Violet shuts the door, leaving the bedrooms' end...

VIOLET
If he makes a ruckus in the night, I can hear him. Leave him to me.

Caroline nods, trailing her back toward the stairs.

VIOLET
Now he's to be fed thrice a day. I make his meals myself and you're not to share them. That was a problem with the last girl, so you know.

CAROLINE
Understood.

VIOLET
He's to be bathed daily and his linens changed. And don't you bother with the house cleaning -- only I know how.

At a side table, she gives a cluck of distaste, picking some dead stalks out of a vase of flowers.

CAROLINE
How long have you two lived here?

VIOLET
Oh, let me think. In '62 we moved down from Savannah. Drove by and made the owners an offer--

CAROLINE
It must have quite a history.

VIOLET
Hmmph. Some greedy old banker built it. We only use about half the rooms. The rest was for Ben's antique business. All the riff-raff he couldn't sell, it's in here. 'Cept the attic--

She stops at the stairs, motioning to the hall's end: the door with the unlit wall sconces.

VIOLET
--it's for china and crystal and such.
(eyes her)
I keep a close count of all that, so you know.

INT. LIBRARY - NIGHT

A CABINET is opened, a JEWELRY BOX is removed, and unlatched to reveal...an old-fashioned IRON KEY.

VIOLET (O.S.)
There's more than thirty rooms in all. They made a separate key for every door in the old days, depending who was allowed where.

She stands with Caroline at a sideboard, amidst the room's stacks of bookshelves, filled to brimming.

VIOLET
For the owner they made a skeleton key. Every room, it'll open. This one's yours, I have the other.

She hands her the key. Then, almost an afterthought:

VIOLET
It's an old house; makes noises. Sometimes shadows play tricks. But don't pay 'em no attention. You be good to it and it'll be good to you.

Caroline frowns at her tone. But Violet's already leaving--

VIOLET
Next is the pantry -- I may send you into town now and again--

CAROLINE
Was there a mirror here once?

Violet stops. Caroline's pointing at the sideboard: an inset section has a different wood stain, as if once covered.

CAROLINE
I noticed in the bathrooms, also. There aren't any mirrors.

VIOLET
Child, you get as worn-out and wrinkled as we are, you don't need reminding. You want a little one for your own use, it's fine with me.

CAROLINE
What'd you do with yours?

VIOLET
We put them away.

INT. LOWER HALL - NIGHT

They reach Caroline's room, finishing the tour--

VIOLET
Now the boy tells me you don't smoke. I smoke, I smoke often and I enjoy it. I trust that won't be an issue.

CAROLINE
It won't be.

VIOLET
Then be aware that in most respects I'll live as if you weren't in residence. We're not kin, after all. Your own parents still living?

CAROLINE
No.

VIOLET
Oh? Must've been young.

CAROLINE
My mother left when I was little. My father raised me. He died...last year...

VIOLET
Oh my. So you cared for him as well?

CAROLINE
I would've.

Violet raises an eyebrow. Caroline shifts, uncomfortable...

CAROLINE
I mean I meant to.
(beat)
I just thought...there'd be more time.

Violet studies her. Caroline expects admonishment...

VIOLET
You think too much about the time you have left, child...you don't spend it living.

Caroline smiles. Violet gives a rare show of warmth...

VIOLET
You be good to my husband. You be good to his house. He'll need his remedies at nine.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

MEDICINE BOTTLES with stroke prescriptions are on a counter. With a pestle, Caroline grinds pills to powder.

INT. UPSTAIRS BATHROOM - DAY

A faucet churns water. Ben's in his wheelchair: slumped, naked skin and bones. A lifeless stare.

CAROLINE
Don't mind me, I've seen it all before...let's get you clean here...

Her pants rolled up, she sets his feet in the tub -- then lifts at the shoulders, guiding him to the tub's edge. She steps into the water, pivots her patient and eases him in--

--and notes the wall above the sink. No mirror.

INT. FOYER - DAY

Caroline locks Ben's wheelchair onto a motorized DESCENDER built into the wall of the curved staircase. He's freshly dressed, his face is blank. It carries him down.

EXT. BACK GARDENS - DAY

Caroline wheels Ben toward a swampfront patch where Violet -- with sunhat and cigarette -- is gardening.

VIOLET
Just set him there, child. Let him face the water -- he likes that. You don't see gardens like these in New Jersey, I expect.

CAROLINE
Actually, it's the Garden State.

VIOLET
Oh, I doubt that very much. Nothing more glorious than a garden. Gone every winter, back every spring. Say, you religious at all?

CAROLINE
I try to keep an open mind.

VIOLET
Oh, good. That's good.
(searching garden-box)
Fiddlesticks, where's my Jack-in-the-Pulpits? Do me a blessing, child, run up to the attic for me. My box of seed packets is by the stairs.

CAROLINE
Thought you said we weren't "kin".

Violet frowns. Caroline's firm, but friendly:

CAROLINE
My name's Caroline. It's not "child."

INT. UPPER HALL'S END - DAY

The attic door sits flanked by the dark sconces. Caroline mounts the main stairs, reaches to open it--

--and finds it locked. She frowns, as if it's the first one she's come across.

INT. CAROLINE'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

The skeleton key is swept up from Caroline's dresser.

INT. UPPER'S HALL'S END

Caroline puts the key into the attic door's lock. It rattles until the teeth catch -- and turn -- as she opens--

--to reveal an enclosed SPIRAL STAIRWELL, with water-damaged wooden steps. She flicks a wall switch -- a dim sconce turns dull yellow somewhere above.

She surveys the claustrophobic space. And steps in.

INT. SPIRAL STAIRWELL

She climbs it to find it ends at a second door -- faded from water damage. She turns the knob. This one's locked too.

Her brow furrows. Two doors locked to the same place?

She inserts the skeleton key. Jiggles, rattles -- unlocks. The upper door creaks open to reveal...

INT. ATTIC

A dark, angled-roof storage space. Water stains warp the floor, shelves and boxes. Shapes under drop-cloths, tattered rolls of insulation, boxes of tile, paint cans.

The only dim light spills from the stairwell. Caroline feels for a wall switch, but finds none.

Instead, her foot kicks a shoebox beside the stairs -- laden with gardening seed packets. She picks it up--

--and then stops. She peers ahead in the dimness. At the far side of the attic, thirty feet further into the shadows, is a backless shelving unit of tile boxes and paint cans.

This shelf is blocking a DOOR.

Intrigued, she steps closer. Floorboards CREAK underfoot.

She pushes tile boxes aside, to glimpse the door -- dark, heavy wood, badly warped, hinges rusted. It appears to have been re-hinged many times. Its knob is rusted black, but its keyhole looks like all the rest.

She sets the seed-box down, puts the skeleton key into the keyhole. And turns.

But the warped door doesn't open. The key sticks and won't rotate. It remains locked.

Caroline jiggles the key, tries to twist the knob and force it -- but it doesn't budge.

She steps back, removes the key. Another floorboard CREAKS. She spins at the sound, then relaxes. She's all alone.

CAROLINE
Huh.

EXT. BACK GARDENS - DAY

Violet's on her kneepads, in the garden, weeding thatch--

CAROLINE
I thought the key opens everything.

She squints up to see Caroline, arriving with the seed-box.

VIOLET
The key, what key?

CAROLINE
The key you gave me for the house. There's a door in the attic it doesn't work for.

VIOLET
In the attic? Oh, that -- no, it's never opened that.
(rifles seed-box)
Jack-in-the-Pulpits. There we are.

CAROLINE
What's in there?

VIOLET
Seeds, child.

CAROLINE
In the attic. Behind the door.

VIOLET
I've no idea. Been shut since we first moved in. The other keys don't seem to work it either. Another closet, I expect.

CAROLINE
You've never opened one of the doors in your own house?

VIOLET
Well, it's not as if we ever wanted for space. Now be a dear and see to Mr. Devereaux -- I wonder if he wouldn't like some iced tea.

CAROLINE
Right.

Violet returns to her gardening. Caroline looks to Ben -- who stares emptily into the bayou...where a RUSTED CANOE drifts, moored by rope to a post on the backyard bank.

CAROLINE
When your husband had his stroke...he was in the attic, Luke said.

Violet sets down her trowel with a sigh.

VIOLET
So he was.

CAROLINE
Do you know what he was doing?

VIOLET
As much as I know what you were. I assume he was looking for something. It's since been difficult to engage him on the subject.

She gives her a snappish look. Caroline nods, retreats.

CAROLINE
Sorry.

VIOLET
Oh, and Caroline...
(a curt smile)
Extra sweet, please, the tea. I wouldn't mind some myself.

INT. CAROLINE'S ROOM - NIGHT

RAIN patters. Caroline's in bed, in T-shirt, panties and headphones, reading a Tulane Nursing course catalog.

Her gaze shifts to the skeleton key. It sits on her side table. She looks away, but her gaze sidles back.

Distracted, she opens the table's drawer and sweeps the key inside. Shuts it and springs from bed.

INT. CAROLINE'S BATHROOM

A COMPACT is snapped open to reveal its tiny MIRROR, as it's placed on the sink ledge.

In its reflection, we see Caroline turn on a hot shower, and then strip off her clothes, her back to us...

ANGLE CLOSES on the compact, as she climbs beneath the spray and pulls the curtain...and the mirror starts to FOG...

INT. CAROLINE'S ROOM

Dark and late. ANGLE CREEPS along bedsheets and a form beneath, to find Caroline sprawled, asleep--

--as there's a LOUD THUMP from upstairs. Caroline stirs.

Then a faint, muffled scrape -- SKRRIIICH! Then silence.

Caroline's eyes open. She looks to the ceiling.

Again, short and muffled -- SKRRIIICH!

Caroline sits up.

INT. FRONT FOYER

Caroline, in a flannel robe, peers up the staircase. Only darkness above. She waits. Rain PATTERS. And then, again, faint but clear -- SKRRIIICH!

She hits the switch for the chandelier. Light FLOODS the foyer and upper landing. Nothing to be seen.

INT. UPPER LANDING/HALL

Caroline arrives at the top, listening for another sound. She checks both directions, then frowns at something.

From a new switch, she shuts OFF the chandelier. The hall goes dark again...save for a dim strip of LIGHT--

--emanating from beneath the attic stairway's door.

Caroline's breath hitches. She reaches into her pocket...and retrieves the skeleton key, as--

SKRRIIICH! She spins. It's behind her.

Thrown, she's now facing the hall end with the bedrooms. She marches for them, desperate to locate the sound. Reaching Violet's door first, she silently tries the knob--

INT. VIOLET'S ROOM

--and opens it to see Violet sleeping, grey hair tangled and back turned. The RAIN'S harder now. Caroline shuts it--

INT. HALLWAY

--and turns to Ben's room. She turns the knob--

--but this one doesn't open. Caroline's surprised. Key still in hand, she inserts it and turns--

INT. BEN'S ROOM

--and reveals a shadowy room with bed empty. Ben's gone!

Caroline hits the lights: his wheelchair's still there. His bed is disheveled. His phonograph still turns, needle stuck and POPPING at the end of a record.

Caroline spins with alarm as -- SKRRIIICH! -- another scrape. Not here, but it's somewhere close--

INT. HALLWAY

Caroline runs out, noting the attic stairway with the LIGHT still on beneath. There are several doors between her and it -- as another SCRAPE sounds, to her right -- behind one--

INT. UPPER ROOMS - SERIES OF SHOTS

The KEY unlocks a door -- LIGHTS ON in a sitting room, cluttered with furniture. Another KEY, another REVEAL -- a guest bedroom, laden with books. Another REVEAL -- a sewing room, more quilts and clutter still--

--and as Caroline nears the hall's end, she stops still -- key already in another door -- as she realizes--

CAROLINE
His was locked...

INT. BEN'S ROOM

She rushes back, scanning the room, throwing open a closet and then noticing for the first time--

--the water puddle beneath the closed windowsill.

She races over, where RAIN batters the roof eaves over the backyard sunporch. She thrusts open the window--

EXT. BACK OF HOUSE - SUNPORCH ROOF

--to see a drenched Ben DRAGGING himself away along the roof, level with his window! SKRRIIICH! with each struggling pull. His legs useless, his palsied arms clawing weakly--

CAROLINE
BEN!

The old man manages a glance back -- of pure terror--

--as he reaches for an IVY TRELLIS at the porch roof's edge, clutching with both hands, dragging full weight onto it--

--as it SNAPS AWAY from the house, and Ben goes with it--

CAROLINE
BEN, NO!!!

--with a twelve-foot ARCING fall to CRASH HARD on the sodden ground! The trellis lands atop him, as does furious RAIN.

INT. UPPER LANDING/HALL

Caroline POUNDS on Violet's door, but doesn't wait--

CAROLINE
MRS. DEVEREAUX! WAKE UP! WAKE UP!

--as she rushes straight for the staircase--

EXT. BACK GARDENS

Caroline BURSTS out the sunporch door, seeing the trellis flat on the ground...and Ben struggling to pull himself away, fifteen feet from it, headed toward the swamp.

CAROLINE
Ben, Jesus, what are you--

--and as she reaches him, his hand LASHES for her throat! His other for her wrist! Caroline recoils, needing a shocked moment to realize he's trying to fend her off--

CAROLINE
It's me! Hey, it's me!

But weak as he is, he keeps struggling, with choked, grunting MOANS. They're the first sounds he's made. Caroline manages to pin his hands -- and he stares with horrified eyes--

CAROLINE
What is WRONG with you?!

--as Violet now runs from the house, in her nightgown--

VIOLET
Mother of mercy, what's he done?

CAROLINE
He got out the window! I thought he was bedridden!

VIOLET
He has the spasms -- oh, Ben -- is he bleeding? Oh sweet Ben--

Violet collapses beside him, kissing his forehead, stroking his hair. He seems to go remote once more--

CAROLINE
God, if he broke something, would he even feel it?

VIOLET
(rocking him)
What'd you do. What'd they make you do...

Caroline notes her strange use of words--

CAROLINE
His door was locked.

VIOLET
I always lock it. His reflexes, they struggle sometimes. He's fallen before--

CAROLINE
From his window?

VIOLET
The stairs. Fetch his chair, child. He'll catch his death. We've got to get him warm--

CAROLINE
What about a doctor?

VIOLET
In the morning. Fetch his chair!

Caroline recoils at her sharpness. Drenched, she backs away, then turns and hustles into the house. Thunder ROLLS.

INT. BEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Caroline hurries in, grabs Ben's wheelchair, then sees she left his window open. She jumps to shut it -- and freezes.

One of Ben's bedsheets hangs half-off the bed, bundled into a twist. STREAKS of dirty water discolor it. Caroline lifts it up straight...fanning the streaks out to form letters -- a ragged, spastic scrawl that reads...

..."*HELP ME*".

VIOLET (O.S.)
CAROLINE!

Astonished, she spins to the window -- where Violet still tenderly rocks her husband in the hard backyard rain.

Caroline considers. Then whips the sheet off the bed, balling it up -- as she grabs the wheelchair--

INT. UPPER HALL

--and rolls it to the stairs, where she stops short. Noticing the light under the attic door...is now off.

INT. CAROLINE'S ROOM - NIGHT

The crumpled sheet gets STUFFED in Caroline's suitcase.

VIOLET (O.S.)
Caroline?!

EXT. BACK GARDENS

Caroline finally hustles out, rattling the wheelchair across the yard to reach the soaked old couple--

VIOLET
What in damnation took you?

CAROLINE
I came as fast as I could.

Violet struggles to lift Ben into the chair--

VIOLET
Help me with him. Help me, would you? Help me now, help me--

Off her repetition of the words, Caroline's eyes meet Ben's. She lifts him, staring right into his eyes -- somewhere pained, lost, unknowable--

CAROLINE
I will.

INT. BEN'S ROOM - DAY

Sun streams in. A balding COUNTRY DOCTOR with stethoscope examines Ben, back in bed, while Violet smokes, looks on.

VIOLET
It's like something comes over him at night -- when he's sleeping -- maybe his remedies aren't right...

DOCTOR
They ease his pain, Violet. At this point that's all we can do.

The doctor regards her -- and her cigarette...

DOCTOR
'Course, as for your own health...

VIOLET
Oh, fiddlesticks. You're here for him, not me.

Around the corner, Caroline's in the hallway...listening.

EXT. BACK GARDENS - DAY

The trellis leans against the sunporch, upright again. Caroline's re-tracing the path of Ben's crawl...

CAROLINE
Where'd you think you were you going?

...and looks ahead to the bayou. In this direction lies the rusted canoe. Beyond it, a distinctive moss-laden oak.

Caroline approaches the canoe. At the water's edge, the ground turns soggy. She looks down and now notices--

--a trail of REDDISH DUST in the grass, like crushed pebbles. (Just like at the doorway of the creepy gas station.) It forms a trail along the waterline, into the gardens--

LUKE (O.S.)
So you're here a week and the man's already trying to kill himself.

Luke's on the back steps, rumpled suit and briefcase.

LUKE
You must have some bedside manner.

CAROLINE
Among my many charms.

LUKE
What the hell happened? I'm s'posed to update her will and she's in with the doc. She says he fell.

CAROLINE
He did fall.

LUKE
From where?

Caroline glances from the sunporch roof to the ground. Luke follows her gaze. Blinks. Caroline nods.

LUKE
There is no way you are serious.

INT. CAROLINE'S ROOM - DAY

The door shuts, with a confused Luke led in by Caroline--

LUKE
Please don't tell me you're quitting. If I have to start over again--

CAROLINE
Oh, excuse me. I didn't realize this was all about you. Shut the door, I want to show you something.

She rummages her closet as Luke does, then sits on the bed.

LUKE
Y'know, my mama used to say, if a lady invites you into her room, she probably ain't much of a lady.

CAROLINE
Homespun Southern wisdom. Grows on trees around here, doesn't it.

Caroline drags out her suitcase, opens it to reveal the balled-up BEDSHEET. As she uncrumples it--

CAROLINE
Look at this. It's from Ben's room. I found it last night when he--

...and trails off, with the sheet now unfurled. It's completely white. The dirty water-writing's not there. She checks the other side, upends it. Nothing.

LUKE
You found...his laundry?

CAROLINE
No, there was...it had...

She's perplexed. Luke looks oddly at her...

LUKE
Had what?

Getting no response, he surveys the room, notices the photo of Caroline and her dad. He picks it up--

LUKE
Hey... This you? You were a rock and roller way back then, huh?

Distracted, Caroline nods vaguely...

LUKE
So the old lady ask you if you're "written on" yet?

He smirks and rolls up a sleeve to reveal a tattoo:

LUKE
Watch out. She hates 'em. Piercings, too, for that matter. She's not much of an adapter.

Troubled, Caroline balls the sheet back up. A mystery. She drops into a chair facing him--

CAROLINE
Forget it. I thought...I don't know what I thought...

LUKE
I admire you, you know. What you do. If my own parents were sick, I don't think I could take care of them--

CAROLINE
You'd regret it.

Luke sees her eyes are on the photo of her and her father.

CAROLINE
I dropped out of college when I was nineteen -- to hit the road, live at clubs and festivals, just following bands. My dad thought I was throwing my life away -- to him, music was just something that sat on your shelf. We didn't talk, didn't visit. Stubborn and proud. And that's how we left it.

LUKE
I'm sorry...

CAROLINE
He died before I even knew he'd been sick. He wanted to spare me, I guess -- from this.

LUKE
Was that so wrong?

Caroline looks at him, resolute.

CAROLINE
No one should have to die alone...

Luke nods respectfully. He gently sets the picture back:

LUKE
Why don't you tell me what you wanted to tell me. About Ben.

CAROLINE
Have you ever...felt like...he was asking you for help?

LUKE
Asking me?

CAROLINE
In any way. A look, a touch. For help.

Luke hesitates, as if recalling something when suddenly--

VIOLET (O.S.)
Mr. Marshall?! Where in damnation are you? Caroline, have you--

A SHARP KNOCK on the door, as Caroline swiftly grabs the balled sheet from the bed and hides it behind her back. Luke notices her strange action -- as the door swings open--

--and Violet stops in mid-sentence to see Luke spring up from the bed, Caroline standing beside him--

VIOLET
Well, I see. The children are getting acquainted...

Luke steps out, waltzing Violet a couple steps into the hall--

LUKE
Now, Violet, you know you're the only woman in my life.

VIOLET
I know no such thing and I would like you to remove your perspirations.

She swats his hands, with a stern look to Caroline--

VIOLET
Hmmph.
(beat)
The physician's departed, young man, so I'm prepared to discuss estate matters. If you're finished soliciting new business.

She harumphs off. Behind her back, Luke dutifully bows for effect -- then hands Caroline a business card--

LUKE
When you have time. To talk.

Violet glances back, eyeing them. Caroline innocently takes his card, and as he follows Violet away--

--Caroline chucks the balled-up sheet back in her closet.

INT. BEN'S ROOM - DAY

A PADLOCK has been rigged to Ben's window.

Caroline regards it from the foot of the bed, carrying a tray of gumbo. She looks to Ben -- sleeping soundly.

She sets the tray down, steps to the window. On a side table is a weathered 1962 PHOTO of Violet & Ben (early 30's) and their house -- beside a "Sold" sign. A couple in love.

Outside the window, Violet's gardening below. Caroline looks from the snapshot to the woman...with a look of resolve...

INT. UPPER HALL - DAY

The SKELETON KEY unlocks the door to the attic stairwell. Caroline glances over her shoulder.

INT. SPIRAL STAIRWELL

She climbs the dim-lit, narrow passage. At the top, she unlocks the second door...

INT. ATTIC

...and confronts the cluttered room, with the warped wood door still blocked by the shelving unit. Caroline takes a breath...then switches OFF the stairway's light.

Pitch black until a FLASHLIGHT pops on. She makes her way to the shelves and warped door--

--and pushes tile boxes aside again, to find the blackened doorknob. She kneels, shines her light in the keyhole. Something's blocking it.

There's a GROAN of roof-beams -- an outside wind. She spins the light, scans the attic...sees nothing...

So she returns to the keyhole. She pulls a piece of coat hanger, jimmies the hole to try and clear it. It CLINKS something metal. Caroline abandons her attempt--

--and switches to a bobby pin. She feels around, gets leverage, and retracts carefully...pulling out--

--a distinctive SHARD OF IRON that PLINKS to the floor. Caroline shines the light: it's a broken piece of key. She holds the end of her own key to it. It's a match.

The walls GROAN again; this time she ignores. She rises, inserts her key into the keyhole.

This time, it turns. CLICK.

Caroline swallows.

And pushes open the door.

A RUSH of air sweeps out, stirring up dust within the attic and forcing Caroline's eyes shut momentarily.

The door sticks, opening only a foot. Caroline clears the tile boxes to one side, and puts her arms and torso through the shelving unit, putting weight into it--

--and as the door opens wider, she climbs fully through.

INT. THE SECRET ROOM

It's the size of a walk-in closet. Slats of natural light come from a small ventilation-grate above, dappled by swaying oaks outside. Dust motes swirl in the half-light.

Hanging from a string overhead, like a drying bouquet, are a cluster of animal WISHBONES.

There are numerous CRATES and BOXES, a WHEEL OF FORTUNE with runic symbols, and two unfinished CANVASES propped up on the floor. There's a rolltop desk with nails protruding from odd angles. A snake-headed SCEPTER in the shape of a cross.

Caroline, on all fours, now rises. Flashlight off.

More faint GROANS from the attic floorboards beneath her.

Her head jangles the wishbones as she stands; like dead chimes. She turns the two canvases away from the wall--

One is a painting of a black wall and oval mirror, with a BLACK MAN's face. The face has no features. The second painting is the same, but in the mirror is a BLACK WOMAN. Featureless -- just concavities and raised ridges. Both paintings look weathered and ancient.

Caroline shudders, turns to the rolltop desk. Opens it to reveal a Mason Jar full of HUMAN TEETH.

INT. SUNPORCH - SAME

The screen door BANGS as Violet enters, wiping her brow and pulling off gardening gloves:

VIOLET
Caroline? I'm making sweet tea -- can I interest you? Caroline...?

She frowns at the silence.

INT. SECRET ROOM - SAME

Caroline opens more desk drawers: finding faded vials of various preserved ROOTS, POWDERS and HAIR. Beneath the desk is a massive round HATBOX made of alligator skin.

She opens the box to find a stack of RECORDS inside. She removes the top one from its sleeve: "August 24, 1909. New Iberia Parish. Papa Justify's Conjure of Sacrifice."

INT. BEN'S ROOM

Violet regards the lunch tray beside her sleeping husband. She lifts a spoonful of the gumbo to her lips, touches her tongue to it. Still warm.

INT. UPPER HALL

Violet shuts Ben's door with a wary look...

VIOLET
Caroline, you in the house?

...and stops, gaze settling on the attic stairway door.

INT. SECRET ROOM

Caroline turns to the boxes and crates: there's a thick SCRAPBOOK atop the stack, covered in dust. It has a mosaic of stones, beads and mirror shards for a cover.

She opens it to a photo of the DEVEREAUX HOUSE, circa 1912. A group poses on the front lawn: a WEALTHY COUPLE and two REDHEADED CHILDREN, flanked by GUESTS in summer formalwear. At the edges, an African-American BUTLER and MAID.

She turns the page. Another photo: the same two children, a BOY and GIRL, both 10. The butler and maid standing behind them, hands on shoulders. Unsmiling.

The next page, in ragged script, reads "Conjure Book of Uncle Justify and Blessed Teachings."

She flips pages, finding instructions, recipes and sketches -- with labels like "Conjure for a Wandering Eye," "Conjure of Coins-in-Pocket," "Conjure for a Lying Tongue."

INT. UPPER HALL'S END

Violet inserts her skeleton key in the attic stairway door, stares strangely as it won't turn. But the knob does.

It was unlocked already.

INT. SECRET ROOM/ATTIC

Caroline spins at the sound of the DOOR below. The top stairwell door is still closed -- but yellow LIGHT now spills through beneath it.

She shuts the book, scrambles out -- accidentally KICKING the 1909 record under the shelving unit and into the main attic! Violet's FOOTSTEPS climb the stairs...

Caroline SCRAMBLES back through, jerking her legs and catching a falling paint can from smacking the floor! She spins to pull the door shut, reconfigures the shelf...and then searches her pockets for the broken end of key--

--which she tries to shove back in the lock. Her hands are trembling, it won't fit in. It hits the floor.

INT. SPIRAL STAIRWELL

Violet's marching up the steps, almost there--

INT. ATTIC

--as Caroline sees the under-door light blocked by shadow. She abandons the effort, snatches the key-piece and crawls for hiding behind a dusty-mirrored dressing table--

--and then sees, ten feet away, the 1909 record lying in the middle of the floor--

INT. SPIRAL STAIRWELL

--as Violet reaches for the second door's knob, not even bothering with the key this time--

INT. ATTIC

--and stepping into...a dark, empty attic.

The record's not on the floor. The warped door, blocked by the bookshelf, is shut. The room is silent.

VIOLET
(dark monotone)
Caroline?

Behind the dresser, Caroline holds her breath, clutching the 1909 record. Hidden from view.

Violet surveys from the doorway, in yellowed silhouette.

VIOLET
You're forgetful, child.

She says it to herself, sighs, and descends the stairs. Shutting -- and locking -- the top stairwell door.

Caroline takes a breath. Waits until she hears the lower stairwell door shut -- and lock -- and then hits her FLASHLIGHT. Rises from hiding, still trembling.

She leans on the dresser to steady herself, glancing at her own face in its dusty mirror--

AS A SHADOW MOVES SLOWLY

right behind her, in blurred reflection. A DARK, FORMLESS SHAPE. Caroline spins, raising hands to defend--

--as a DARK DUSTCOVER slips off a standing DRESSING MIRROR.

Caroline relaxes, steps to re-cover it. It has an ornate, gilt-silver frame. Oval. Etched with figurative detail.

But as she replaces the cover, she notices a whole GROUP of sheet-covered objects leaning against the wall nearby. She removes the sheet to find...MIRRORS. Dozens of them. Large, small, fancy, plain. Some of them have faces WARPED -- the glass BUBBLED, DISTENDED or SCRATCHED.

Caroline turns a troubled circle -- scouring the attic with the flashlight beam. Shadows and silence.

INT. UPPER HALL'S END

An EYE through a keyhole. A beat later, the door opens and Caroline slips out into the empty hall.

INT. CAROLINE'S ROOM

She pulls the 1909 record from under her shirt, stuffing it under her pillow as--

VIOLET (O.S.)
Where've you been?

Caroline spins. The old woman's in the doorway.

CAROLINE
I...I fell asleep. I just woke up--

VIOLET
He has his gumbo.

CAROLINE
Yeah. He was sleeping, though, so...I just left it--

VIOLET
Best to wake him and feed him or the gumbo gets cold.

CAROLINE
I'm sorry, Mrs. Devereaux. I'll heat it up again right away.

VIOLET
No harm. I know how it is...to be tired.

She holds Caroline with an enigmatic look.

VIOLET
Now when you next go into town, I've left a list in the kitchen--

CAROLINE
How about tonight.

VIOLET
Tonight would be fine.

Violet seems to soften...and smiles.

VIOLET
I thank you for all the help you've been, Caroline. It's so nice not to be alone anymore. In this house.

EXT. NEW ORLEANS DOWNTOWN - DUSK

Caroline's Civic traverses the big city's streets.

INT. CAROLINE & JILL'S APT. - CLOSET - NIGHT

An old RECORD PLAYER gets dug from a packed closet, amidst crates of CD's and albums. A box labeled "Dad's Blues Collection" gets dislodged...and spills its records all around Caroline. She regards them for a moment...

INT. APT. LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

The dusty record labeled "August 24, 1909 -- New Iberia Parish -- Conjure of Sacrifice" hits the turntable.

Caroline lowers the needle.

SCRATCHES and POPS. Heavy background noise, as if an amateur -- possibly outdoor -- recording. Then a fuzzy DRUMBEAT and CLAPPING. RATTLING from a sand-filled gourd, a WASHBOARD and then a woman's soulful HUMMING--

--which soon takes on the rhythms of an old Negro spiritual--

FEMALE SINGER (ON RECORD)
Lawdy lawd, come to free my soul--

GROUP CHORUS (ON RECORD)
Lawdy lawd, come to free my soul--

SINGER
Lawdy lawd, let the good times roll--

CHORUS
Lawdy lawd, let the good times roll--

SINGER
Rattlesnake, rattlesnake, shed that skin--

CHORUS
Rattlesnake, rattlesnake, shed that skin--

SINGER
Split me open, let the lawd roll in--

CHORUS
Split me open, let the lawd roll in--

The call-and-response picks up the pace--

SINGER AND CHORUS
Rollllll on! *Rollllll on*! Rollllll on! *Rollllll on*! Roll! *Roll*! Roll! *Roll*! Roll! *Roll*! Roll! *Roll*!

As the shouts of "Roll" hit like drum-strikes, a MAN's guttural CHANTING begins -- low and steady, building ominously, words unintelligible. And a WOMAN's wordless SONG -- an open wail, changing wildly in pitch and volume.

Caroline stares at the spinning record, stepping closer, trying to make out the CHANT...as the SONG builds into a SHRIEK -- someone screaming? -- and then goes SILENT...

Caroline hovers, breathless.

Only the MUSIC continues...the rattling, lurking beat...

And now Caroline turns...to see Jill standing in the front doorway, speechless. Caroline slaps the needle silent.

CAROLINE
Hey, hi -- I was just playing some, y'know...new music...
(off her look)
Local band.

INT. BLUES CLUB - NIGHT

A ZYDECO BAND plays for a dancing downtown crowd. Caroline and Jill are in a booth, already several beers down. Jill is studying the conjure record:

CAROLINE
So the wife says it's been locked up the whole time they've lived there. Maybe true, maybe not, but either way, that is not your average attic--

JILL
You found yourself a hoodoo room.

CAROLINE
A what?

JILL
You know what hoodoo is?

CAROLINE
Another word for voodoo, right?

JILL
No. Voodoo's a religion, slaves brought it from Africa. You pray to a God, you believe in an afterlife... Hoodoo's different -- it's American. It started here in the South.

CAROLINE
How's it different?

JILL
It's more about magic. Folk magic. God's got nothing to do with it. It's to help you in the here and now.

CAROLINE
You mean magic like abracadabra?

JILL
My Aunt Nola's into it. She shops at a place north of the Quarter--

CAROLINE
She <u>believes</u> in it?

JILL
She keeps a book of spells and stuff. Y'know, get your man back, make your man leave -- that shit always sells.

CAROLINE
She stick the pins in the dolls?

JILL
I think that's just for the tourists.

Caroline doesn't smile. Jill sees she's still bothered.

JILL
Look. You <u>said</u> the house had a history, right? I wouldn't worry -- hoodoo itself's pretty harmless.

CAROLINE
Harmless how?

JILL
It's psychological -- like all that stuff. It can't hurt you if you don't believe.

Jill shrugs. Caroline picks up the record, studies it:

CAROLINE
So this place your aunt shops?
(intrigued)
Ever seen it?

EXT. FRENCH QUARTER FRINGE - NIGHT

Late. Caroline and Jill wander a shadowy block, a little drunk on their feet. Jill's looking for landmarks--

JILL
It's around here somewhere, all right? Lay off. It's either this street or the next one. Or...the next one.

CAROLINE
Where we walking to, Texas?

JILL
You think this is like my hangout or something? Girl, I shop at the mall--

Jill reaches the block's end and stops...at the sight of a run-down LAUNDROMAT on the next street. Dim-lit, a few disheveled LOCALS inside. The only business open.

JILL
There.

CAROLINE
There? That's a laundromat.

JILL
That's all I know. That's where she goes.

Caroline surveys the dark and ominous block. Regards Jill.

CAROLINE
So we going in or what?

JILL
I'm not.

CAROLINE
I thought you don't believe in this stuff--

JILL
I don't. But still...you don't just mess with it. You want to check it out, go right ahead.

Caroline regards her with a big smile:

CAROLINE
You're scared. Jill the Thrill is scared--

JILL
Oh, go to hell--

CAROLINE
You are never gonna live this down. After we come all the way out here--

JILL
I AM NOT SCARED!

She glares harshly -- a standoff. Which is interrupted by the faint sound of a trance-like PERCUSSION BEAT. Caroline cocks her head. Then looks back at Jill:

CAROLINE
You hear music?

EXT. CLAPBOARD CHURCH - NIGHT

Caroline and Jill round an alley to see a run-down CHURCH with its entrance on the alley. Some children are outside, drawing on the asphalt with chalk. As the percussion is joined by a ragged GOSPEL CHOIR...

INT. CLAPBOARD CHURCH - NIGHT

The doors are open to reveal the tiny nave, with a cluster thirty PARISHIONERS -- working-class, both black and white.

JILL
Midnight mass or something...

Some clap hands in time with the music, others hold arms up and sway. It's like a revival service...except there are none of the trappings of a normal Christian church...

CAROLINE
So where's the cross?

Jill regards the decor -- no stained-glass, no Bibles. But many MIRRORS. The parishioners block their view of the front...so Caroline starts inside. Jill hisses--

JILL
Hey -- Cary -- get back here!

--but Caroline moves up the aisle, to the back of the crowd. She strains to see past the swaying figures--

--to where the seven-member CHOIR sings, in black-robes. A PRIEST in an ornate African robe sits, looking on. Before the altar sits a small, wizened white woman, 80's, wearing rags. This is the BAYOU WOMAN. (We've seen her before, walking the bayou road near the Devereaux house.)

The woman is attended to by a teenage BLACK GIRL, who pours a chalice full of liquid and puts it in the woman's shaking, palsied hands. The woman drinks it--

VOICE FROM CHOIR (O.S.)
Now who's a-here to be blessed now?
Now who'd a-die be blessed now?

--as two LITTLE BOY ACOLYTES in gold robes pull a BLACK MAN from the swaying crowd. As the breakout CHOIR VOICE repeats and repeats, they drop him to his knees before the altar--

--as the Bayou Woman rises up to the building MUSIC -- and SPITS A SPRAY of the liquid into the man's face! He falls back as if blinded and staggers back to the pews--

Caroline watches, fascinated, as the Chalice Girl refills the cup and the Acolytes re-approach the crowd. She looks back for Jill, who's still hanging way back--

--and then turns to see the Acolytes have grabbed her arms. They pull her forward toward the altar--

CAROLINE
No, wait, let me go--

--but the Acolytes hold her tight. The Bayou Woman drinks the chalice, then rises up--

CAROLINE
Not me, I'm not here for this -- stop, please, I'M NOT HERE FOR THIS!

--and as the Acolytes force Caroline to her knees, she sees the Bayou Woman's milky, vacant eyes. The woman is BLIND. And as she purses her lips to spray--

VOICE FROM CHOIR (O.S.)
Now who's a-here to be blessed now?
Now who'd a-die be blessed now?

--Caroline suddenly jerks aside! -- as the Bayou Woman blows a spray into the vacant air! The parishioners, surprised, stop swaying. The choir trickles silent.

Caroline scrambles up to see the whole church's stare. No malice, merely confusion. But it's unnerving all the same...

CAROLINE
I'm sorry...just...start over--

She hustles back past the pews...joining Jill at the exit, who's already walking away, head low--

CAROLINE
OK, my fault--

JILL
I don't know you, I don't know you, I do not know you--

They're gone, as finally the church music resumes again...

INT. NEW ORLEANS TAXI - NIGHT

Caroline and Jill are silent passengers, staring ahead. They a little shaken...until finally Jill speaks:

JILL
I asked a girl when you were up there. They said when the Bayou Woman blesses you, it's supposed to mean a year's good luck.

CAROLINE
Good luck?

JILL
Yeah. Nice going.

They ride in silence for a moment.

JILL
Can I make one suggestion, Cary? About that attic of yours?
(beat)
Leave it alone.

EXT. DEVEREAUX HOUSE - NIGHT

Late. Only a porch light on as Caroline's Civic returns...

INT. BEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Ben lies sleeping as Caroline checks in on him. She steps to his side and adjusts his blanket.

The old man twitches slightly, shuddering. His mouth moves but he remains asleep. Caroline sadly strokes his hand...

INT. UPPER HALL

Reluctantly, she re-locks his door with the skeleton key...

VIOLET (O.S.)
Goodnight, Caroline.

The voice comes from behind Violet's closed door. She's still awake. The light is off beneath.

CAROLINE
Goodnight, Mrs. Devereaux.

No further reply. She's about to leave when she notices the "black swans" painting is off-kilter. She centers it--

--but its wire slips further. Caroline catches it, trying not to make noise. But hanging at its angle, it reveals a sun-faded bit of discoloration on the wall.

Caroline frowns...and lifts the painting away. A hidden section of the wall is faded -- in a smaller, oval shape. Like something <u>else</u> used to be hanging there.

Caroline stares. Then looks again to Violet's door...

INT. ATTIC - MOMENTS LATER

The door edges open as a SHADOW falls upon the boxes and furniture...and then the covered mirrors in the corner.

It's Caroline. With a determined look in her eye.

INT. VIOLET'S ROOM - MORNING

Sun streams brightly. Violet's just dressed, bed made, as she empties a vase of dying flowers and exits--

INT. UPPER HALL

--crossing to unlock Ben's door, humming to herself--

INT. BEN'S ROOM

--as she opens it and GASPS. The vase drops and BREAKS.

REVERSE to see Ben in bed, staring at her with a wide, frightened gaze. But Violet's eyes are not on him.

They're on the MIRROR now hanging on his wall.

INT. FRONT FOYER

Violet hurtles downstairs, clutching the mirror. She hits the foyer and stops still--

--at the sight of ANOTHER MIRROR now hanging beside the door.

INT. CAROLINE'S ROOM - MORNING

A POUNDING brings Caroline to the door. She's in her T-shirt, just out of bed -- as she opens to see--

VIOLET
I TOLD YOU ABOUT THE MIRRORS!

She's clutching three wall-mirrors, her eyes wild--

CAROLINE
I don't understand, what's--

VIOLET
This isn't your house! There's rules here! There are rules of this house!

CAROLINE
What, I found 'em -- I needed one in my bathroom and--

VIOLET
I told you! You heard me! NO MIRRORS!

Violet storms off. Caroline allows a small smile.

INT. ATTIC - MOMENTS LATER

Violet puts the mirrors back in the corner, re-covering them with a dropcloth as Caroline enters behind her--

CAROLINE
I've seen the room.

Violet spins, tense.

VIOLET
What room?

CAROLINE
The room you say you've never seen.

She pulls the half-key from her pocket -- the broken metal bit that was wedged in the lock.

CAROLINE
It's not locked anymore.

Caroline starts for the warped door -- as Violet DARTS to defend it. Blocking the shelves with her body! Caroline stops still. A tense silence...

VIOLET
You don't know...you don't know what you've seen...

Her voice, for the first time, is scared. Caroline nods.

CAROLINE
No, but you're gonna tell me -- or I am outta here. Right. Now.

EXT. BAYOU SWAMP - DAY

Spanish moss sways in the breeze, dangling from oak and cypress. Their twisted trunks soak in the duckweed waters.

VIOLET (O.S.)
You're not from the South, you won't understand.

CLOSE on Violet's face, beaten and resigned. She takes a long drag from a cigarette, flecks the ash away.

VIOLET
A room like that -- you don't throw those things away. It just brings trouble on you. Best to leave 'em where you find 'em.
(distant)
House is theirs as much as ours.

CAROLINE
The house is whose?

REVEAL they sit at opposite ends of the rusted canoe -- drifting -- in the waters just off the backyard. Ben is in the gardens, a wheelchair still-life.

CAROLINE
Whose things are in that room?

She has her arms folded, a skeptical inquisitor. Violet nods to the paddle in Caroline's lap, with annoyance--

VIOLET
Away from the house. I said row away.

Caroline paddles a bit...until Violet grudgingly begins...

VIOLET
About a hundred years ago...the banker that lived here, Thorpe was his name. Made his fortune cheating the poor, the way I heard it.
(MORE)

VIOLET (CONT'D)
It was him and his family and a couple of colored servants. Names of Mama Cecile and Papa Justify.
(beat)
Now what Thorpe didn't know was Justify was what folks called a two-headed doctor. A conjure man. Cecile too. They believed in this sort of magic -- Southern magic--

CAROLINE
Hoodoo.

Violet looks up sharply. Nods.

VIOLET
That was their room.

FLASHCUT - PAPA JUSTIFY

BOOM! A black butler in 1910's-era suit and tails, PAPA JUSTIFY, 45, stares at us from a dark hall. He holds a flickering black candle; his hand wears a RUBY SNAKE'S HEAD RING. An ominous, unsmiling face.

FLASHCUT - MAMA CECILE

BOOM! A black maid, MAMA CECILE, 32, stares soullessly too, from the darkest depths. Holds another black candle -- and wears a SUNBURST PENDANT made of animal teeth.

BACK TO THE BAYOU

VIOLET
They were famous in the bayous; healed the sick and hurt the mean -- hit a straight lick with a crooked stick, as the coloreds say. But to Thorpe, they were just the help. He worked 'em, he abused 'em, threatened to fire 'em or worse. Till, the story goes, one night there was a party...

EXT. DEVEREAUX HOUSE - NIGHT - FLASHBACK (1912)

Vintage MOTORCARS fill the drive, as FOOTMEN escort PARTY GUESTS in black tie into the lit-up, elegant mansion.

VIOLET (V.O.)
It was the bank's anniversary and all the muckety-mucks came -- politicians, sugar barons, riverboat tycoons...

INT. DEVEREAUX HOUSE

The privileged CROWD mingles from room to room. A JAZZ BAND plays. Champagne flows. In the foyer, some GUESTS take their coats and bid farewell to the elegantly-dressed ROBERTSON THORPE, 40's, and his wife MADELEINE.

VIOLET (V.O.)
Well, there was drinking and dancing and a tryst or two, I'm sure, and when came the time to say farewells, some guests wanted to wish goodbye to Thorpe's children. But no one knew where they'd gone to. No one'd seen 'em for hours.

INT. UPPER HALL

Several drunken GUESTS stumble upstairs, calling "Martin" and "Grace." They're followed by Thorpe...

VIOLET (V.O.)
So they all made a game out of it. Searching the house for the children, full of brandy as they were. And then someone heard music...and voices...and shouting. From the attic.

Thorpe turns toward the attic door at hall's end...

INT. ATTIC STAIRCASE

Thorpe charges up the spiral stairwell and slams into--

INT. ATTIC

FLASHCUTS: a PHONOGRAPH playing. Cracked, warped MIRRORS. BLACK CANDLES around the room's perimeter. Chalk CIRCLES. POWDERS and HAIR. WISHBONES jangling, casting shadows...

...on the innocent faces of redheaded MARTIN (9) and GRACE (7), sitting cross-legged, their eyes wide.

Beside them sit PAPA JUSTIFY and MAMA CECILE, in sweat-soaked underclothes and convulsing as if possessed.

VIOLET (V.O.)
The servants were up there with 'em. They'd been teaching 'em how to conjure up hoodoo.

Thorpe SNATCHES up his children -- but Justify and Cecile spasm on, eyes rolled back. Thorpe screams for help.

VIOLET (V.O.)
Well, Thorpe 'bout went insane -- and his guests with him. Who knows how long such blasphemy'd been going on.

In the chaos, Justify's RUBY RING skitters across the floor, coming to rest snake's-head-up...

INT. UPPER HALL/ATTIC

GUESTS come racing, piling upstairs as Thorpe's wife rushes little shell-shocked Martin and Grace away--

VIOLET (V.O.)
All that money, all of them drinking. They'd thought the party was over. It was just getting started.

EXT. BACK GARDENS

A HANGMAN'S NOOSE goes over an oak branch. A MOB of guests piles out, carrying Papa Justify and Mama Cecile as prisoners. They struggle to no avail -- their hands are bound and they're dragged into boats.

Beneath a gnarled oak, tuxedoed GUESTS set two nooses around their necks. More guests haul on the rope. The two servants are strung up, jerking and twisting. The mob hurrahs.

Some WOMEN in gowns rush out with bottles of rum. Other GUESTS douse the hanging corpses, as a cummerbund is LIT...

In an upstairs window, Martin and Grace stare in stone horror. As the two reflected figures go up in FLAMES...

Until their mother steps into view and lowers the shade.

INT. BAYOU SWAMP - BACK TO PRESENT DAY

The same gnarled oak remains. Caroline stares up, from where their canoe floats right beneath it...

VIOLET
Rumors got out, but no arrests. No trial. Money has a way...

CAROLINE
What happened to the family?

VIOLET
Thorpe's bank went under. He shot his wife to death, then shot himself. People said it was the servants' revenge. The children stayed to '62.

CAROLINE
They stayed here?

VIOLET
We bought the place from 'em. They took us up to that attic once -- the day of sale. But they never told us why the room was locked up. Or why the whole house had no mirrors.

Caroline stares sharply. Violet surveys the house...

VIOLET
But we know now.

CAROLINE
You know what?

VIOLET
You see 'em now...in the mirrors.

CAROLINE
Who...

VIOLET
The servants. Ever since my husband opened up their room.

FLASHCUT - THE WARPED DOOR

BOOM! The door in the attic, unblocked. Beckoning.

FLASHCUT - PAPA JUSTIFY AND MAMA CECILE

BOOM! Staring at us from a MIRROR's reflection. With a curtain of FLAMES burning behind them.

BACK TO SCENE

Caroline blinks, incredulous. Violet looks to Ben's lonely perch on shore. A quiet tremble:

VIOLET
I've gone and read some hoodoo books. They say putting brick dust down keeps harm away--

CAROLINE
Mrs. Devereaux--

VIOLET
So I put a circle 'round the house--

CAROLINE
Mrs. Devereaux! For God's sake!

Violet glances up like a wayward child, then into her lap--

VIOLET
I don't expect you to believe me.

CAROLINE
You don't. You don't expect me to believe that you see ghosts in your mirrors.

VIOLET
Not till you see them too. Or see their light on. Or hear voices up there...

CAROLINE
Your husband had a stroke.

Violet's gaze holds. She crushes her dying cigarette.

VIOLET
When we moved in and saw that room, we swore we'd never touch it. Well, a month ago Ben went in there. I don't know what he wanted, I don't know what he did. But that's how I found him.
(scared)
The ghosts are here now. And whatever they did to him...I won't let 'em do it to me.

There. She's said it. She won't meet Caroline's eyes, but looks to her husband with infinite sadness...

VIOLET
And now you'll leave like all the rest.

And off Caroline's look...

EXT. DEVEREAUX HOUSE - YARD - DAY

A sprinkled trail of RED BRICK DUST meanders the weeds along the property line. Caroline tracks it to where it crosses the gated driveway. She kneels and swipes a red finger...

INT. GARDEN SHED - DAY

A mower, bags of fertilizer and tools. Caroline kneels at a homemade trough of pulverized BRICK DUST.

Beside it, a sledgehammer and a bag labeled "Botanica Bricks - - Blessed for Spiritual Uses." She shakes her head:

CAROLINE
Some gig this turned out to be...

INT. UPSTAIRS BATHROOM - DAY

Ben stares into space...as Caroline's arms reach under and lift his helpless body into the bathtub.

CAROLINE
C'mon, here we go. Nice and easy. You'll feel lots better after.

She gets his legs in, swings him around and lowers him gently. She senses a presence and turns--

--to see Violet behind her, with linens and a grateful smile.

VIOLET
Thank you, Caroline. For understanding...our house.

Caroline nods. Violet moves on. Caroline splashes water on Ben's chest and starts soaping his arms--

CAROLINE
Hell of a wife you've got there. She thinks you got hexed in that attic by ghosts. Spooky, huh? You had the stroke and she's the one missing blood to the brain.

She drops the soap, which splashes WATER into her face. Soap stings one of her eyes--

CAROLINE
Ahh--

--and she goes to the sink to flush it with cold water. She rifles her purse for her COMPACT, checking her reddened eye in reflection. To Ben:

CAROLINE
She says they show up in the mirrors. Ghosts in your mirrors...

She sets the compact on the sink's edge, and as she turns back...it falls off. Hits the floor and SNAPS SHUT.

Caroline picks it up...and then sees Ben staring at it. His eyes are wide, rapt. She frowns, studies him--

--and then places the compact on the far ledge of the tub. Ben's eyes follow it as if it's a small predator.

Intrigued, Caroline slides it closer -- along the tub's edge. Closer...closer...closer...

...and as she brings it nearer to him, his entire body starts TREMBLING, eyes scared, water rippling and splashing as if he wants to run but can't. She brings it toward his face--

--and snaps it open so he can see the MIRROR--

--and suddenly Ben erupts with CONVULSIONS! Eyes panicked, he FLAILS his whole body and MOANS, SPLASHING water everywhere. An arm JERKS out and sends the compact flying--

CAROLINE
Ben, stop! I was just kidding--

She tries to calm him, but he keeps moaning. Caroline darts to shut the bathroom door, hoping Violet can't hear -- and then collapses at the tub, holding Ben's shoulders...

CAROLINE
Shh, shh, I didn't mean to scare you. I'm sorry, Ben. I'm so sorry...

...until he finally calms and quiets. Caroline regards the fallen mirror and her helpless patient...

CAROLINE
You see them too...

EXT. DEVEREAUX HOUSE - DAY

Caroline marches out, jacket and purse in hand. She waves a shopping list at Violet, working in the gardens--

CAROLINE
Going to town! Shopping!

VIOLET
What for? Caroline, what for?

Caroline jumps in her Civic. She glances in the rear-view mirror -- at her own reflection. Sotto:

CAROLINE
We're gonna just have to see...

She starts up the car and drives off...leaving Violet in the flower beds...watching her go...

EXT. CITY LAUNDROMAT - DAY

The same ominous block of the French Quarter she visited with Jill. Only mildly less threatening by daylight; the run-down laundromat a little busier. A BEGGAR nearby plays spoons...

...as angle REVEALS Caroline watching from the corner. Finding her courage...and starting toward it.

INT. LAUNDROMAT - DAY

A handful of LOCALS watch Caroline enter. Some black, some white, all working-class. All glance up at the newcomer, then return to their loading and sorting.

At the back, there's an alcove with a change machine, cigarette machine and a BEADED CURTAIN. Caroline surveys the room, then approaches--

--as a bloodshot-eyed CREOLE MAN charges out, in her face. He cradles a misshapen wet plastic bag and stares hotly. She hitches her breath...as he storms right past.

INT. BACK OF LAUNDROMAT

Caroline pushes through the beaded curtain to a cluttered inventory corridor, where an uneven STAIRCASE leads upward. And takes the creaky first step.

INT. UPSTAIRS BOTANICA

At the top of the stairway is a dim-lit storeroom. Entering, she notes a line of RED DUST. Wall-to-wall shelves with boxes of roots, bones, powders. Chicken feet. Snake skins. Murky mysteries in cloudy jars.

MAMA CYNTHIA, a heavyset dark-skinned Creole in her 40's, sits at a counter with a frail woman CUSTOMER, 30's. A BOY nearby does homework. Tinny French music on a radio.

The Frail Woman spins warily, revealing a split lip and a black eye. Caroline's interrupted them. Mama Cynthia sighs--

MAMA CYNTHIA
Here to get your things clean, child?
Or get 'em dirty.

CAROLINE
(hesitates)
I...I'm not sure I'm--

The Frail Woman spins back to Mama Cynthia, WHISPERING intently. Mama Cynthia pats her hand, motions to an open side door. The customer slips out like a shadow.

Mama Cynthia folds her hands. The Boy resumes his homework.

MAMA CYNTHIA
What might we help you find?

CAROLINE
(advances, cautious)
That dust -- at the door. How's it work?

MAMA CYNTHIA
You lay a line down, nobody who means you harm can cross it. It's how you tell your friends from your enemies.

She reaches the counter, glancing to the open side door. In a room beyond, a TINY OLD WOMAN, 90's, lies motionless on a bed. Caroline hesitates, then gathers her bravado:

CAROLINE
This...all this stuff...it's like hypnotism, right? Suggestion. When it works, it's 'cause a person <u>believes</u> it works.

Mama Cynthia studies her, betraying nothing.

CAROLINE
And if you thought, y'know, "magic" made you sick...you might believe in a magic cure. Even though it's make-believe -- all in your head -- it might actually help you--

MAMA CYNTHIA
(nods, understanding)
Mm. Someone been working <u>roots</u> on you...

CAROLINE
No, not me, it's not me...
(beat)
Say I knew someone who believed he'd been -- whatever you call it--

MAMA CYNTHIA
Fixed.

CAROLINE
Fixed. Yeah.
(risks it)
Would he believe he could be "unfixed"?

Mama Cynthia stares, enigmatic. Motions her to sit:

MAMA CYNTHIA
What's the nature of his illness?

CAROLINE
He can't speak. Or barely move. He had a stroke but...he seems to think someone made him that way.

MAMA CYNTHIA
You want to know what happened to him.

CAROLINE
Yes.

MAMA CYNTHIA
You want him to tell you.

CAROLINE
If he could.

MAMA CYNTHIA
Would you be here if you thought he couldn't?

CAROLINE
What I think has nothing to do with it.

The woman muses, then grabs a CIGAR BOX and shuffles down an aisle, picking out crushed herbs, a silk sachet and a white candle. Humming to herself.

Caroline glances again to the side door. Now it's closed. She looks back, gives the Creole Boy a smile. He doesn't return it. Unnerved, she rises to pursue Mama Cynthia--

--who opens a Chinese Cabinet of tiny rolls of parchment. She picks one out, holds it up. Adds it to the cigar box.

MAMA CYNTHIA
When I tell you what you have to do, you need to do it exactly the way I tell you. Every step and every word. Exactly -- or I'm not responsible. No one on this earth's responsible -- save for you, child. You understand?

Caroline nods.

CAROLINE
And what happens then?

Mama Cynthia smiles, gleaming gold-capped teeth.

MAMA CYNTHIA
And then you pay me.

INT. NEW ORLEANS RADIO STATION - DAY

Caroline's in an empty deejay booth, with Jill (at work), to whom she's showing the items in the hoodoo cigar box.

JILL
You went in there. You actually went in -- are you out of your mind?

CAROLINE
Come on. You've never heard of a psychosomatic treatment?

JILL
Yeah, well, this is not that--

CAROLINE
How much of a patient's recovery depends on his believing he can?

JILL
What recovery? This is hospice! You're supposed to help this guy die!

CAROLINE
He believes in this stuff--

JILL
So what? Who's he to you?

CAROLINE
Just forget it--

Caroline snatches back the box. With a hint of exasperation:

JILL
How 'bout you forget it. He's not your dad, Cary. Not this one, the last one or the one before. Why do you have to go and get so attached?

Caroline stops. A surprised -- and hurt -- stare. She starts collecting her things to go...

JILL
I'm sorry.
(no response)
Cary, I'm sorry--

CAROLINE
Let me share something with you. There's abandoned and there's attached. Attached is better--

JILL
I know. Cary, I know. I am sorry.

She means it. The tension fades and Jill tries a smile.

JILL
But look at yourself, wouldya? You want to be a nurse and you just walked out of a witch doctor's.

Caroline considers, shrugs. She's at the door:

CAROLINE
It's not for me.

EXT. DEVEREAUX HOUSE - DUSK

THUNDER rolls as the IRON GATES open and Caroline's Civic returns, under the oaks' shadows. Luke's Bronco is there... and as Caroline parks, he's exiting with his briefcase.

LUKE
Hey there. Sounds like rain coming.

She tucks the cigar box into her purse, cloaking it--

CAROLINE
House call, huh?

LUKE
Yeah, for the last time, looks like. Collecting signatures. Probably won't be seeing you out here again. 'Least till he...you know...

He trails off, shrugs toward his briefcase.

LUKE
Thought you were gonna give me a ring. The other day. About Ben.

CAROLINE
It was nothing.

LUKE
Oh. Oh, okay.
(shrugs)
See you, then.

He extends his hand for a handshake. Caroline smiles oddly, but takes it -- and Luke suddenly clamps down hard--

--causing Caroline to drop her purse. The cigar box spills out -- but not open. Luke pulls her close, voice low--

LUKE
You mean it's nothing when you touch him and he holds on like crazy? And nothing when he stops the second she walks in?
(off her look)
Just 'cause justice is blind doesn't mean lawyers are.

Caroline regards him, surprised...as he lets her go...

LUKE
But it's nothing, you're saying. I can go home knowing I've done all I can for the man. For my client.

CAROLINE
I don't know.

LUKE
Will you know?

She doesn't respond, studying his earnest face...

LUKE
My job's to help him, just like you. If I haven't, in whatever way...please tell me.

His voice is genuine; Caroline nods. And then Luke notices the cigar box. He lifts it, with a shake of his head--

LUKE
Christ. That lady's gonna smoke herself into the grave.

--and as she hitches her breath, he hands it back, unopened. She stuffs it back in her purse...just as Violet appears beyond at the front door.

VIOLET
Welcome home, Caroline. You were gone quite a while. Say farewell to Mr. Marshall now.

Luke sees the tension in Caroline's face at Violet's voice. He frowns, but doesn't let on...

LUKE
Take care of yourself, OK?

He gets in his Bronco and drives away. Violet waves from the steps, left with Caroline...her purse tightly clenched...

INT. CAROLINE'S BATHROOM - NIGHT

Shadowy. THUNDER rolls. A HOT FAUCET steams as Caroline stealthily fills a large bowl. Checking over her shoulder.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Violet sleeps in a chair, some quilting on her lap, a RADIO on. A SHADOW passes silently, carrying a tray...

RADIO VOICE (O.S.)
...with forecasters calling for up to a foot of rain in coastal areas as the storm makes its way across the Delta starting overnight...

INT. UPPER LANDING/HALL

Caroline mounts the stairs, with a bowl of steaming water and the hoodoo cigar box. She reaches the landing...

...and she walks on, ANGLE DRIFTS toward the attic door...

INT. BEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Ben sits in near-darkness, his phonograph playing soft BLUES. A key sounds in his lock. His eyes shift.

CAROLINE
Hi, Ben.

She slips in, sets her tray down...and re-locks the door. Ben's eyes shift to the tray. Soft THUNDER rumbles.

CAROLINE
I want to show you something...that's gonna be our secret. You and me.

Ben tremors slightly. His eyes meet hers.

CAROLINE
Violet says you didn't have a stroke up in the attic. She says some ghosts made you this way. With a spell. Is that what you believe?

Caroline sets the tray on the bedside table. She adds the sachets of herbs to the water...

CAROLINE
Well, I know a spell too, Ben.

She circles Ben's bed with the bowl, trickling a spatter-line across the floor. Ben's eyes widen.

CAROLINE
I know a spell that makes you better.

She brings the bowl back to the table, lights and floats the white candle. Then takes Ben's bedsheet; tears a swatch:

CAROLINE
And all you have to do is believe it.

By flickering candlelight, Caroline soaks the cloth, and wrings it over Ben's head. Then unrolls the scrap of parchment...and takes a deep embarrassed breath:

CAROLINE
(feeling stupid)
A man's words get lost, get lost in the head...till the water runs down, till the water runs down...

Ben trembles, wide-eyed. Warm water trickles his face. Soft THUNDER outside. Next she wrings the cloth over his neck:

CAROLINE
(a little stronger)
A man's tongue gets tied, gets tied in the throat...till the water runs down, till the water runs down...

Water trickles. More soft THUNDER. His shaking stare remains. Caroline sighs, but summons her strongest voice yet as she now wrings the cloth over his lips--

CAROLINE
A man's voice goes free, goes free to the world...when the water runs down--

A SUDDEN THUNDERCLAP sounds outside -- Caroline jumps, spins--

--as Ben gives a CHOKED CRY, a rasp of a speech--

BEN
Cccc...cccc...ccc...

Caroline jerks back, shocked.

BEN
Cccc...cccara...cccarra...
(sputtering)
Ccccaroline...

INT. LIVING ROOM - SAME

ANGLE RUSHES across the room...to Violet. As if awakened.

INT. BEN'S ROOM

BEN
Cccaroline, hhh...hhh...

CAROLINE
(astonished)
It's all in your head...

BEN
Hehhh...hehhpp...

CAROLINE
Talk, Ben, talk to me. Keep talking--

BEN
Hehhppme...hehhppme...

CAROLINE
Help you how? How, Ben?!

Ben's desperately intense, mouth struggling to say--

BEN
Ggggemeoutofhere--

VIOLET (O.S.)
CAROLINE?!

There's a POUNDING on the door. Caroline spins--

VIOLET (O.S.)
CAROLINE, ARE YOU IN THERE?!

--and Ben jerks in bed, arms spasming in fright--

BEN
Gggmeotofere! Ggmeotofere! Now,
gaggh, gggmeotofere!!!

--knocking the water bowl off the table! It SPILLS to the floor, DOUSING the floating candle out! And the second it goes out, Ben's choked silent!

CAROLINE
No -- NO!
(to the door)
Just a second, I'm here, one second--

VIOLET (O.S.)
WHAT ARE YOU DOING WITH HIM?!

Ben SPASMS again, flailing and falling off the bed. Caroline tries to catch him but he collapses--

CAROLINE
Ben, why? Get you out of here why?!

VIOLET (O.S.)
CAROLINE, OPEN THIS DOOR!

CAROLINE
ONE SECOND!

She cradles Ben's head -- his mouth is struggling but no words come. A KEY is rattling in the lock.

CAROLINE
I'll help you, I promise -- just talk to me. What happened in that attic? Who are you afraid of? Tell me who you're afraid of!

He raises a shaking arm...struggling higher and higher...

...as the lock turns and Violet's silhouette fills the doorway. To see Ben's condemning finger pointed...at her.

VIOLET
WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?!

Caroline's frozen. Glances to the spilled water. The doused candle. Violet charges in--

VIOLET
What is this?!

CAROLINE
He...he was crawling again...in his sleep. He fell. I brought water...

VIOLET
Get away from him!

She shoves her aside, hauling Ben back into bed. He stops protesting, goes limp and passive in her arms--

--as Caroline steps back, snatching up the spilt bowl, the parchment and candle. Violet strokes Ben's face, unaware--

VIOLET
It's all right now. I'm here, it's all right. Need your remedies, don't you. Need to sleep...

Caroline edges for the door, trying to rub out traces of the "water circle" as she goes. Violet turns her way:

VIOLET
You were talking to him?

CAROLINE
I was just...telling him a story. To settle him down.

VIOLET
What kind of story?

CAROLINE
Just a story. No ghosts.

Violet studies her stare.

VIOLET
That'll be all for tonight, I think.

CAROLINE
I'll come back to clean the room--

VIOLET
It's all right. Thank you.
(nods to door)
That'll be all.

She remains at her husband's side, holding his hand. But Caroline sees only Ben's frightened eyes...

INT. UPPER HALL

She backs away, clutching her empty bowl...as there's the sound of a LOCKING KEY.

INT. CAROLINE'S ROOM - NIGHT

CLICK! As Caroline locks her own room's door.

She opens her closet, digs out her suitcase. Inside is the "Conjure of Sacrifice" record she stole from the attic room. She adds the candle and parchment, re-closets it.

Then hears faint phonograph ZYDECO resume upstairs. As RAIN patters the window outside. Storm's here.

INT. LOWER HALL - NIGHT

Silent. Empty. Darkness. A strange ANGLE moves toward Caroline's door. It seems to float the hallway...closing fast...and then drifting INSIDE THE KEYHOLE...

INT. CAROLINE'S ROOM

...to where Caroline sleeps. Tangled in sheets, tossing in discomfort. As ANGLE closes TIGHT ON HER FACE...

FLASHCUT - PAPA JUSTIFY

BOOM! The black butler staring, black candle and ruby ring.

BACK TO CAROLINE

twisting fitfully, as if seeing the image in her dreams...

FLASHCUT - MAMA CECILE

BOOM! The black maid staring, with candle and bone amulet.

FLASHCUT - THE WARPED DOOR

In the attic, the door THUMPS as if struck from behind. No shelves block it. Mirrors hang on either side, SHIVERING.

BACK TO CAROLINE

turning again, shoving the sheets off...

FLASHCUT - THE REDHEADED CHILDREN

From the 1912 lynching, mourning at the window, with the reflected FLAMING CORPSES, as their mother draws the shade.

FLASHCUT - THE WARPED DOOR

Getting BATTERED from behind, straining at its hinges, making the hanging mirrors SWAY. THUMP...THUMP...THUMP...

A PAIR OF SCISSORS

SNIPS closed in darkness, BLADES SLICING TOGETHER--

INT. CAROLINE'S ROOM

As Caroline wakes with a GASP, bolting up in bed. She grabs sheets, getting her bearings. She collapses back, turns over to check the windowsill clock, beside her compact--

--and sees a SHADOWY SHAPE in the compact's mirror -- a figure pulling her bedroom door shut!

Caroline spins -- the door now closed. She leaps from bed, tries the knob. It's locked. Just like she left it.

INT. LOWER HALL

A key RATTLES as Caroline jerks open her door -- to see an empty hall.

CAROLINE
Mrs. Devereaux?

Just darkness and silence.

INT. CAROLINE'S ROOM

She shuts and re-locks her door. Flips on the light and surveys the room. Nothing seems amiss.

She pulls an end table to block the door, then looks to the compact in which she saw the shadowy movement. She strides over...and snaps it resoundingly shut.

EXT. DEVEREAUX HOUSE - MORNING

A SCATTERING OF BRICK DUST. In a steady rain, Violet hums privately as she shakes a fresh trail around the yard. Ben's on the sunporch, in his chair, eyes vacant once more...

INT. CAROLINE'S ROOM - SAME

Caroline's packing her things, in a hurry -- clothes, books, her father's camera...

CAROLINE
I don't need this...her and her "ghost" shit...there's a million jobs, I don't need <u>this</u> one--

--and then she glances out her window, for a glimpse of Ben on the sunporch. Her shoulders sag with conflicted emotions...as she glances to her father's picture...

...and then shuts the suitcase.

EXT. SUNPORCH

Ben stares into the rain, with Violet puttering at the nearby garden shed. Caroline arrives, a jacket on, at Ben's side.

CAROLINE
I wish I could help you...

She stands there, then takes his hand. He doesn't respond.

CAROLINE
I wish I could...

His eyes slowly find hers, growing hopeful...

CAROLINE
But it's...all in your head...

Ben's eyes, giving up, slowly drift away. Caroline lets go of his hand, reluctantly, rising to--

VIOLET (O.S.)
Going somewhere?

Caroline spins to see Violet arriving. Noting her jacket...

CAROLINE
Town.

VIOLET
Went to town yesterday.

CAROLINE
He's low...on his medication.

Violet nods. Studies her.

VIOLET
About last night, Caroline...I know you were only trying to help. I just get scared for him sometimes. I don't want to see him hurting...

CAROLINE
No. Why would you.

She gauges Violet, who merely nods a smile.

VIOLET
He had years left -- good years. Years we coulda put some use to.
(beat)
I feel sorry for all those folks, who don't have people like you -- to help them through it. No one should have to die alone.

Caroline's gaze narrows at her words. She nods...

VIOLET
But he's not alone, now, is he? No, he's got you...

Violet places hands on Ben's shoulders -- possessively. The old man's eyes are downcast, forlorn.

VIOLET
Run along now, Caroline.
(a tight smile)
On your way.

INT. CAROLINE'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Caroline enters, jacket on. She stares at her suitcase. She looks again to the window -- where on the sunporch, Violet now sits beside Ben's wheelchair. She's holding his hand. Yet his head and whole body seem to be turned away from her.

Caroline looks from this tableau...back to the suitcase...

...and makes her decision...

...as she drops to her knees and pops it open. Her dad's CAMERA is right on top. As she SNATCHES it up...

INT. ATTIC - MORNING

The stairwell door opens, casting dim light on the shelf-blocked warped door. Rain PATTERS the roof.

Caroline marches in and grabs an end of the bookshelf. She strains, PULLING it aside, scraping the floor, but she doesn't care. The warped door now sits exposed.

She hesitates a beat. Then inserts the skeleton key.

INT. HOODOO ROOM

Caroline warily re-enters to see everything as she left it... as she lifts her CAMERA and starts taking pictures.

And as FLASHES go off, one after another...ANGLE CREEPS TOWARD the stack of MIRRORS in the attic, toward an uncovered corner, to spy her in reflection...

EXT. NEW ORLEANS LAW BUILDING - DAY

Establishing. An old downtown law firm.

CAROLINE (V.O.)
It's all in their attic. Conjures, hexes, spells -- they're written in books and preserved on records...

INT. LUKE'S OFFICE - DAY

PICTURES of the hoodoo room are dealt down on a desk. The faceless paintings. The jars of teeth and hair. The "Conjure Book of Uncle Justify and Blessed Teachings."

CAROLINE
They believe in this, both of them--

Amidst a disorganized room, Luke's at his desk, in suit and tie. He studies the photos; Caroline waits, on edge.

LUKE
Well, I see your cause for concern... but my family's superstitious too. We're called Baptists.

CAROLINE
This is different.

LUKE
Why? 'Cause you don't have it in Hoboken? It's charming. Local color.

CAROLINE
You said yourself you were worried about him.

LUKE
Well now I'm worried about you. You a nurse or a detective? Look at this newfangled thing...

He picks up the Hasselblad as there's a KNOCK on Luke's door, as a timid SECRETARY enters--

SECRETARY
Mr. Marshall, Mr. Tennary needs to know if you've found his documents yet. Also, Mr. Macombe and Mr. Dodd want to review your new client files--

Luke presses hands to his temples, shuts his eyes. Overload. He waves a dismissive hand. The secretary retreats.

LUKE
Estate law, I thought. That sounds good. How hard can that be. I've been playing catch-up for weeks--

CAROLINE
When did you first meet the Devereauxs?

LUKE
Just before he had his stroke. They wanted a lawyer to update their wills.

CAROLINE
Was it his idea or her idea?

LUKE
What do you mean?

CAROLINE
Did it ever seem like she knew something was going to happen to him?

LUKE
How, from her tarot cards in the attic? A seance in her sleep? What's it matter?

He throws up his hands in frustration, scattering Caroline's photos. Then calms, sits back, regrets it.

LUKE
This is not what I was hoping for when I gave you my number.

He tries a smile. Caroline doesn't return it.

CAROLINE
I want to know why the last girl quit.

INT. RURAL NURSING HOME - DAY

A POV tracks a faded hall, glimpsing elderly black RESIDENTS through the open doorways of shabby rooms. Most lie in bed, watching TV game shows or the ceiling.

In a final room, HALLIE (black, 20's), is at the bedside of an emaciated WOMAN, massaging her hands...as she turns to see an older NURSE with Caroline and Luke.

EXT. NURSING HOME BACKYARD - DAY

Still raining. A brown-grass lot. Caroline and Luke sit with Hallie under a ratty awning, as she smokes...

HALLIE
Ever hold someone's hand while they died, Mr. Marshall? Nuh-uh. What's dying to you. I ain't gotta give my reasons to you.

She stares Luke down, challenging. Then to Caroline:

HALLIE
How is he?

CAROLINE
He's suffering. He's been trying to tell me.
(beat)
And I think it's because of her.

Hallie studies her as she takes a drag. Offers the pack.

CAROLINE
No thanks, I don't smoke.

HALLIE
You a superstitious person, Caroline?

CAROLINE
No. Not really.

HALLIE
I told my mama where I was workin', she said only blood and tears ever happened there. Last owners were some rich brother and sister. They pissed away all their money, then died of strokes after they sold the place.

CAROLINE
Wait...strokes?

Even Luke's interested now. Hallie stays focused on Caroline:

HALLIE
Maybe they found something they shouldn't. Maybe now Ben did too.

CAROLINE
Do you know about the attic?

HALLIE
She said they shut it up when they moved in.

CAROLINE
Do you know about the mirrors?

HALLIE
She said you see the servants there.

CAROLINE
She told you the story?

HALLIE
May be their room and their conjures. But ain't no ghosts put a spell on her husband. She did.

Caroline wavers at Hallie's conviction:

CAROLINE
You really believe that?

HALLIE
Don't you?

LUKE
(throws up his hands)
I am not here. This is not happening.

HALLIE
I think whatever was found up in that attic...she's trying to use it.

LUKE
I am not hearing this!

He leaves the table, utterly frustrated. Left alone, Hallie meets Caroline's eyes. Caroline swallows.

CAROLINE
I heard it can't hurt you. It can't hurt you if you don't believe.

HALLIE
Then I suggest you leave that house before you do.

EXT. BAYOU COUNTRY - DAY

RAIN POURS harder as Luke drives his Bronco, Caroline beside--

LUKE
For God's sake, this is insane. The man had a stroke. A stroke!

CAROLINE
So why isn't that what he thinks?

LUKE
What, she made him that way? She found some "spell book" in the attic? OK, fine. So why? Why?

CAROLINE
I don't know.

LUKE
And so you want to take him away from her? From his own wife?

Caroline says nothing.

LUKE
How can you believe in this--

CAROLINE
I don't believe! I don't! The point is he does!

She looks up as they pass the gas station.

CAROLINE
Stop the car. Stop the goddamn car!

LUKE
Why?

CAROLINE
So I can show you he's not the only believer.

--as she suddenly brakes hard and swerves another way.

EXT. RAMSHACKLE GAS STATION - DAY

Still RAINING as Caroline arrives at its familiar door. A "Closed" sign hangs. Luke's beside her--

CAROLINE
See the line across the doorway? It's brick dust. Hoodoo. Keeps your enemies from coming across. See the wishbones hanging? This stuff's got a hold on people out here...

LUKE
But it's not real--

CAROLINE
It doesn't matter it's not real. It's real to them--

And now Caroline suddenly stops still. There's MUSIC coming from nearby. Low but building. A kind of DRUMBEAT CHANT. Similar to one we've heard before...

LUKE
What -- what's wrong...

Caroline grabs Luke's hand and pulls him around the side. There's a low-slung HOUSE just behind the gas station, on the same lot: torn screen door, laundry hanging.

EXT. RURAL HOUSE

Rain pours down as they approach. The MUSIC's coming from inside. Another ominous call-and-response...

SINGER AND CHORUS
Heal the spirit from the sickness...
Heal the spirit from the sickness...
Cast it out if you be strong...
Cast it out if you be strong...

Caroline creeps closer. There's a baby CRYING inside; the same WAIL as heard on her previous visit. SHADOWS of figures behind a curtained window...

LUKE
What are you doing?

CAROLINE
The music...I know that music...

As the music's DRUMBEAT builds, the baby's CRIES intensify, now a steady SHRIEK...as through the curtain, a BABY's silhouette is raised into view--

CAROLINE
It's for a spell--

--and Caroline races ahead, opening the screen door and--

LUKE
Caroline, wait!

INT. RURAL HOUSE

--storming into the candlelit living room's wild tableau: a young CREOLE WIFE, 20's, and her MOTHER, 50's. The wife holds the crying, ointment-slathered BABY over a bath basin. The baby's body is covered in horrible SORES--

--and the Mother spins at the intruders, YELLING angrily in French. Casting them out, an alarmist invective--

--as Caroline and Luke spin back to the door -- to see a blank-faced CREOLE HUSBAND at the screen, clutching an ICEPICK! Caroline gasps and Luke grabs her away--

CREOLE HUSBAND
Child's got it bad.

Caroline and Luke stop short. Glance back. The Wife shushes her vitriolic Mother, as she dips the baby in the basin.

CREOLE HUSBAND
The chicken pox.

He enters to join the women, jabbing his icepick into a mineral brick to salt the water. What seemed like some nightmarish ritual is just parents trying to heal a baby.

CREOLE HUSBAND
Next gas is 'bout five miles down.

Caroline surveys the room -- as Luke motions her out--

LUKE
Sorry, we -- she heard it crying, she thought -- sorry, really, sorry for troubling you. Caroline. Caroline--

CAROLINE
The record.

She refuses to move, her eyes on the family's turntable:

CAROLINE
Where'd you get that record.

EXT. FLOATING BAYOU SHACK - DUSK

An ominous dwelling sits atop a murky patch of swamp, deep in the bayous. A post-and-plank footpath navigates the thicket of trees. Rain continues to pour...as Luke's Bronco arrives. And Caroline and Luke trade a wary look...

EXT. SHACK PORCH - DUSK

Bones, skulls and dried roots hang. Wooden planks creak as they reach an open doorway...with RED DUST beneath it. Luke hesitates, pulling a foot back in mid-step--

CAROLINE
It's just for protection.

LUKE
Says you.

He edges aside, directing her to enter first. A weak smile:

LUKE
Mama raised a gentleman.

INT. SHACK - DUSK

Caroline ducks in, with Luke taking a tentative step over the dust to follow. It's a ratty home and a hoodoo supply store all in one. Bare-board walls and a leaking roof.

In the shadows, a decrepit white BAYOU WOMAN, 80's, sits in a rocking chair, sewing a gris-gris.

CAROLINE
Ma'am? Excuse me? Hello?
(no response)
We've heard you loan records. Um, special records.

The woman faces away. Rain drips around her.

BAYOU WOMAN
Ain't no records for no one here.

CAROLINE
How 'bout records by a man named Justify?

The Bayou Woman stops rocking. And turns to reveal she's the same "blessing" blind woman from the back-alley "church service" in New Orleans. Caroline's breath hitches--

BAYOU WOMAN
How you know that name?

CAROLINE
You...you know it?

BAYOU WOMAN
Most powerful conjurer who ever done lived. Legend of Terrebone Parish. Some say his spells still hidden dere.

CAROLINE
Hidden where?

BAYOU WOMAN
Big ol' house. Hoodoo folks been always trying to buy it. Some couple from Georgia in 'dere now. Prob'ly no idea what's in--
(stops, frowns)
Who else is in here? Someone else in here?

LUKE
Just me.

Caroline now spots a stack of records and rifles them; labels like "Broken-Heart Conjure," "Money-Come Conjure", dated 1910's and 1920's. The woman rises and fumbles closer--

BAYOU WOMAN
Now stop there -- don't be touching--

CAROLINE
Do you know a record called the Conjure of Sacrifice?

The woman stops stone still.

CAROLINE
'Cause I have it, if you do.

The Bayou Woman's breathing sounds raspy, accelerated...and then relaxes. Shakes her head with a smile:

BAYOU WOMAN
You're funning with me. You had <u>that</u>, you wouldn't say so. No, no.
(then, nervous)
Who's in here? How many of you--

She trembles as she feels her way closer, withered arms shaking toward Luke, who edges aside--

CAROLINE
You <u>do</u> know it.

BAYOU WOMAN
Greatest conjure on God's green earth. They say Justify done discovered it, but he got kilt 'fore he could use it. Him and his poor wife both. It han't never been found.

CAROLINE
What's it do?

The Bayou Woman turns toward <u>her</u> now. Right in her face...

BAYOU WOMAN
It keeps you from dying.
(beat)
Not forever. But for awhile.

CAROLINE
What are you talking about...

BAYOU WOMAN
You has to sacrifice somebody and take the years that they had left.

LUKE
Whoa, wait -- as in human sacrifice?

BAYOU WOMAN
You gets to take what they was due.

CAROLINE
It's for a person to live longer? By killing someone?

The Bayou Woman's toothless smile goes grim...as a sickening feeling again overtakes her.

BAYOU WOMAN
You han't found it. No, no. Wouldn't tell if you found it...

She edges forward, claws like feelers. Caroline and Luke edge back, as she sweeps her arms for them--

BAYOU WOMAN
You han't found no conjure of Justify's. Tell me you han't! Who are you? WHO'S IN HERE?!

She suddenly LUNGES out, as Caroline darts aside -- sending the Woman crashing into boxes of roots--

LUKE
We're going -- get out, go--

He shoves Caroline toward the door, shaking the Woman off as she flails for his legs.

BAYOU WOMAN
NO! I ain't no one or nuthin'! I'll trade you anything! Anything! TELL ME YOU HAN'T FOUND IT!

EXT. FLOATING BAYOU SHACK - NIGHT

Caroline and Luke hurry across the bayou footpath, leaving the poor woman's cries behind.

EXT. MUDDY ROAD - NIGHT

The rain pounds down as they reach the Bronco--

CAROLINE
Hurry up! He's all alone with her!

LUKE
Hang on -- Caroline -- WAIT!

He grabs her shoulders, resists her attempt to fend him off. They meet eyes in the downpour. Luke lets go.

LUKE
You got me scared now.

CAROLINE
If I get proof she's out to hurt him -- will you stand by me?

LUKE
Hurt him? You mean kill him--

CAROLINE
Will you stand by me?

LUKE
So why hasn't she killed him already?

CAROLINE
Maybe it takes time!

LUKE
Let me go back with you. Let me talk to her -- hear her side of it--

CAROLINE
We both show up, she'll know something's wrong. I'm getting him out and I'm getting the police -- but I can't if I first don't get proof.

There's a HOWL of lament from the distant bayou shack. It gives them a chill...as they share a look...

LUKE
So what the hell happens if I never see you again?

As she grows worried by his tone--

LUKE
Then this is called just-in-case.

--as he leans in and kisses her swiftly on the lips. She's surprised, but doesn't pull away...

LUKE
Yeah, I know. I pick my moments.

They regard each another anew...as the rain comes down...

CAROLINE
Do you believe? In any of this?

LUKE
(conflicted)
Get the proof.

EXT. DEVEREAUX HOUSE - NIGHT

RAIN continues, relentless now, with huge PUDDLES OF STANDING WATER in the yard as Caroline returns...

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

THUNDER rumbles as RAIN sheets the windows. Violet stands by Ben's wheelchair, facing away. The front door SHUTS o.s.

CAROLINE (O.S.)
Mrs. Devereaux? I'm home!

Violet doesn't look up. SNIP-SNIP -- she's cutting Ben's hair. And then she sets her scissors down...

As angle REVEALS the "Conjure Book of Papa Justify" on the table beside her. Open to a page labeled "Conjure of Supreme Protection." As Violet tears it from the book...

INT. CAROLINE'S ROOM

Caroline scampers in, drenched. She places a PHARMACY BAG down and locks her door. Then hurries to her closet--

--to find her packed suitcase. She opens it, shoving her clothes aside to find where she stashed the "Conjure of Sacrifice" record. But it doesn't seem to be there--

CAROLINE
No... It was in here, I <u>know</u> it was...I put in right -- in -- here!

Caroline searches the case and closet. Nothing. The conjure record is <u>gone</u>. With a grave look...

CAROLINE
Where the hell's the record...

INT. GARDEN SHED - DUSK

Caroline SLAMS inside, checks stealthily over her shoulder. She drops to the trough of pounded BRICK DUST...and scrapes handfuls into a paper bag...

CAROLINE
It's not real...it's not...it's not and we're gonna <u>prove</u> it...

INT. CAROLINE'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Caroline pulls away the area rug at the base of her door, scattering a line of the BRICK DUST across it.

She then lowers the area rug back to conceal the line. She wipes her hands clean, then nervously opens the door...

CAROLINE
Mrs. Devereaux?!

INT. KITCHEN

Violet wears an enigmatic stare, putting towels on a leaking windowsill. Some pots steam on the stove.

CAROLINE (O.S.)
Mrs. Devereaux, could you come here?

INT. LOWER HALL/CAROLINE'S ROOM

Violet rounds the hall, with apron and handtowel. THUNDER rolls as she stops at Caroline's doorway--

VIOLET
I was beginning to become concerned. You were gone quite a while.

Caroline's at the far side of the room, by her window.

CAROLINE
It's really raining out there.

VIOLET
S'posed to pour all night. Stays this way, the swamp'll start rising. Takes a toll on my flower beds.
(beat)
You wished to see me?

CAROLINE
I was wondering if you could take a look at this -- there's a leak here--

She points to the cracked ceiling above her windowsill.

VIOLET
Oh, they're all over. Just rainwater.

CAROLINE
Yes, but if you look up close -- come on in, I can show you better.

Violet narrows her eyes, takes a step across the threshold--

--and stops. Hesitates there -- one foot in the room, one foot out. As if sensing something unpleasant.

She retracts the foot that had entered the room.

VIOLET
I've supper on the stove. I shouldn't leave it.

CAROLINE
It'll just take a second.

VIOLET
I can see fine from here.

Caroline's smile fades. Violet holds her gaze, searching it.

VIOLET
Why don't you put this on the sill.

She holds out the handtowel she has with her.

CAROLINE
All right.

Caroline holds out her hand. But doesn't move.

Neither woman takes a step toward the other.

CAROLINE
Could you just come in the room, just for a second, so I could show you... what I'm seeing?

Violet regards her gravely, then shakes her head:

VIOLET
You're an odd one, Caroline.

A tea kettle starts WHISTLING o.s. Violet smiles and -- from the doorway -- tosses her towel onto Caroline's bed.

VIOLET
I've made tea.

She heads back down the hall. Caroline shudders a touch, crossing the room to shut her door--

--as Violet stops at hall's end. Turns.

VIOLET
And after you see to Mr. Devereaux's remedies, perhaps you'd be so kind as to join an old woman for supper. It'd mean a great deal to me.

CAROLINE
Well...I wouldn't want to--

VIOLET
Wonderful. We should have done it days ago.
(a pleasant smile)
I'll make you something.

INT. BEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Ben lies in near-darkness as Caroline brings his medicine tray. His eyes look to her expectantly as she sets it down. And resolutely whispers into his ear...

CAROLINE
We're leaving tonight.

INT. UPSTAIRS BATHROOM - NIGHT

Caroline brings Ben's finished dinner tray in with her. She takes a pharmacy vial of strong SEDATIVE PILLS from her pocket. She dumps them into Ben's medicine pestle and grinds them into dust...

...beside a handful of carefully hollowed-out SUGAR CUBES.

VIOLET (O.S.)
Caroline! Supper!

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

A CHUNKY RED BOWL OF GUMBO and a glass of iced tea sits before Caroline as LIGHTNING crashes outside.

Violet sits at the table's opposite end, already eating. Caroline warily eyes the meal before her...

VIOLET
It's strange, isn't it, how one gets attached? I miss you now, when you're not around the house. Ben and I...we never had children of our own.

CAROLINE
Why was that?

VIOLET
Selfish, I suppose. How's your gumbo?

CAROLINE
I'm just starting. Did you want, um, sugar for your tea? I put it out--

She nods to the bowl of SUGAR CUBES between them.

VIOLET
Oh, I don't think I'll take sugar tonight.

CAROLINE
But I thought you liked it...with sugar. You always take sugar.

VIOLET
Do I? I suppose I do.

CAROLINE
(thinks, gets up)
I should bring the pitcher out, in case we want more--

VIOLET
Eat your supper, don't be silly. Eat.

Violet eyes her...until she retakes her seat. Caroline stirs her gumbo, but doesn't eat. Another THUNDERCLAP.

VIOLET
You think I'm senile, don't you. Ghosts in the attic with spells on her husband -- she's just a senile old woman, isn't she.

CAROLINE
I just don't understand -- these "ghosts" -- why they'd put a spell on him and not on me. I've been in that room too.

VIOLET
Maybe they can't.

CAROLINE
Why not?

VIOLET
Maybe you don't believe in them.
(beat)
(MORE)

VIOLET (CONT'D)
Maybe all houses have spirits, and we simply don't see them...until we believe we can.

Caroline sets down her spoon, eyes on the sugar cubes--

CAROLINE
Y'know, I'm not really that hun--

There's a FLASH OF LIGHTNING outside and an immediate LOUD THUNDERCLAP -- as the electricity SUDDENLY GOES OUT!

VIOLET
Fiddlesticks. Don't move, I'll fetch candles -- eat your gumbo, dearie me--

In the dark, Violet rises -- and takes the bowl of sugar cubes...as she feels her way into the kitchen--

Once she's gone, Caroline jumps at her new chance: fumbling in her pocket to find her sedative vial -- still with a dozen PILLS. She shakes them all into her napkin, balls it up--

--and CRUSHES it underfoot quietly. She darts up, feeling along the table to Violet's end...and funnels the huge dose into Violet's iced tea. She stirs it quickly, as CANDLELIGHT flickers, coming closer--

--and Caroline darts back to her chair -- just as Violet enters with two lavender CANDLESTICKS--

VIOLET
By candlelight it is.

--and sets them in the centerpiece holder. She doesn't notice Caroline grab her fallen napkin, re-settling.

VIOLET
There we are.

CAROLINE
So. Was that the storm or the ghosts?

VIOLET
Say what you will about spirits. I've always wondered if there wasn't something to be learned from them.

She takes a drink of her tea...and frowns at the taste...

CAROLINE
Like a spell?

A dark look flickers as Violet lowers her glass.

CAROLINE
I have great respect for your husband. Whatever he thinks has happened to him...he's fighting it.
(beat)
So what did happen, Violet?

VIOLET
You haven't touched your gumbo.

CAROLINE
What have you done to him?

VIOLET
I made you that gumbo and you haven't even touched it.

CAROLINE
What have you done--

VIOLET
I am his wife and he is my husband and whatever I wish to do to him, I'll do!

She BANGS the table and shoots to her feet -- and then sways unsteadily. She turns pale, a tiny slur to her voice--

VIOLET
What is this...

CAROLINE
He's not safe in this house.

VIOLET
No...you...what'd you do...

CAROLINE
Not with you.

VIOLET
What've you...issmyhouse...

CAROLINE
I'm taking him, Violet.

VIOLET
NO!!!

She lunges for Caroline, but the drug's already taking effect -- she loses balance, hits the table on her way to the floor--

VIOLET
(slurred, sluggish)
...toolate, toolate, not again too late...you whore, little whore...

--as she struggles to take a stick of GOLD CHALK from her pocket. She tries to draw a circle around herself--

VIOLET
...keepimindishouse...keepim, oh keepim...keepimindishouse...

Fading fast, she pulls a folded piece of parchment...but then collapses. Caroline snatches the paper from her grasp -- it's the torn "Conjure of Supreme Protection." Concentric circles marked with crosses, blood and hair. Violet MEWLS--

VIOLET
...issmine!

--as Caroline pockets the parchment and runs.

INT. UPPER LANDING/HALL

Caroline races upstairs with a CANDLE lighting her way. As she passes the door to the attic--

--there's a ROAR OF WIND outside from the storm. It sounds otherworldly. She glances to the attic door...but runs on...

INT. VIOLET'S ROOM - NIGHT

Caroline THROWS OPEN the door--

--and SCREAMS to see a GREY-HAIRED FIGURE lying in Violet's bed! She leaps back -- but the figure doesn't move, facing away. Caroline pulls away the sheets--

--to reveal a trio of bunched, tied PILLOWS and a white wig. It's a dummy. Caroline reacts--

CAROLINE
She's not in her room at night, she's in the attic...

--then opens the side table to see Mason jars full of RED BRICK DUST. She notices a circle of it around the bed...which she suddenly SHOVES aside--

CAROLINE
Ghosts, my ass...

--to reveal a CIRCULAR CHART OF RUNES "burned" into the hardwood floor beneath, like an arcane calendar. Against the wall, there's a SMALL FOOTLOCKER. She opens it--

--and finds a white sheet, which she unfurls to see the words "HELP ME". Beneath it is the "Conjure of Sacrifice" record.

And finally she lifts a tied SWATCH OF HAIR. Distinctive hair. As she lifts it to see the color matches her own.

INT. BEN'S ROOM

She kicks open the door, carrying the footlocker--

CAROLINE
Time to go.

INT. UPPER LANDING/HALL

She struggles to carry Ben down the stairs -- bypassing the motorized lift -- awkwardly reaching the door--

EXT. DEVEREAUX HOUSE

Rain SHEETING down. The yard saturated, starting to flood. Caroline carries Ben to her Civic, into the backseat--

CAROLINE
I'm coming right back, I swear--

INT. UPPER LANDING/HALL

She scrambles back upstairs, grabs her footlocker of "proof"--

VIOLET (O.S.)
...Carrrroline...

Caroline freezes. The voice is weak but chilling.

INT. DINING ROOM

Violet still lies on the floor, eyes shut. Her hand opens and closes, as if trying to fight...

VIOLET
...Carrrroline...

The front door SLAMS o.s.

EXT. HOUSE/INT. CIVIC

The car's wheels SPIT water as it REVS away from the house, WIPERS flaring to keep the deluge away--

Caroline glances to the backseat, where Ben lies slumped against the footlocker--

CAROLINE
Hang on, Ben, just hang on--

--and looks ahead to see the driveway's IRON GATES closed! Caroline YELLS and slams on the brakes. The car hydroplanes to a stop at the thick metal bars -- locked with HEAVY CHAIN.

CAROLINE
No...no...

She scrambles out and tugs to no avail. Raging, getting drenched...she leaps back in the car. REVERSES swiftly--

CAROLINE
Hold on tight.

--and then ACCELERATES, a thirty-foot slam right at the GATES! And BANG! The gates hold. The Civic's hood crumples. Caroline's head hits the dash.

INT. DINING ROOM

Violet struggles to her knees, sluggish, disoriented...

VIOLET
...keepiminthishouse...

EXT. DEVEREAUX HOUSE - AT THE GATES

Caroline pounds the wheel as the engine dies. Ben has slipped to the car's floor, in a crumple--

CAROLINE
No, no, no, no...

The car's dead. Desperate, Caroline tumbles back into the downpour. She struggles with Ben's door, clutching him beneath the arms and dragging him out--

CAROLINE
We've gotta hide you--

--and as she desperately surveys the waterlogged yard, LIGHTNING flashes, illuminating the distant garden shed.

INT. GARDEN SHED

Caroline drags Ben in. There's a foot of water on the ground. She sweeps clear a storage shelf of tools--

--and struggles to lift Ben onto it, lying him flat and pulling a rain tarp over him. He's scared--

CAROLINE
I'll get help, I'll find help -- I'll be back with help.
(grabs his hand)
I will not leave you.

EXT. DEVEREAUX HOUSE

Caroline splashes back to the Civic, retrieving the footlocker and turning toward the house as--

--Violet appears on the front porch, in silhouette. Drowsy, she braces with a HUNTING RIFLE for support. In her other hand, she shines a FLASHLIGHT across the yard.

VIOLET
Carrrroline...

Caroline darts to tree-cover, splashing across the yard. Violet tracks the splashes with her light--

--but Caroline makes it to hiding. Violet shines onward, missing her. Caroline creeps further--

VIOLET
Where's my husband, child?

EXT. SIDE OF HOUSE

Caroline stays shrouded in trees, with the RAIN soaking her, edging away from Violet's voice, toward the back--

VIOLET (O.S.)
You think you'll take him from this house? Think you're stronger than me?

The rising bayou now floods the back gardens, encroaching on the house. And in the gardens...floats the rusted canoe.

EXT. DEVEREAUX HOUSE

Violet surveys the front yard with the flashlight...

VIOLET
You have no idea how strong I am...

...as she hears SPLASHES somewhere in back.

EXT. BACK OF HOUSE

Caroline shoves the CANOE into the bayou, with the footlocker aboard, and scrambles into it herself.

At the house, Violet struggles around, shining the beam, rifle raised and ready.

VIOLET
Carrrroline...

But the canoe slips silently toward the cover of mossy oaks, RAIN cloaking the sounds of Caroline's paddle--

VIOLET
Carrrroline...

And Caroline and the footlocker slip further away--

VIOLET
CAROLINE!

--as Violet grows panicky now, sweeping the light across the swamp, well short of the canoe's location now--

VIOLET
WHERE ARE YOU, CAROLINE!!!

In the bayou, soaked and shivering, Caroline paddles and paddles...into the watery darkness...away...away...

EXT. WATERFRONT ROADHOUSE - NIGHT

Still raining. Parking lot half-full. ZYDECO plays from inside, as a CANOE plunks against a dock piling.

Caroline shudders as she ties off the boat. Her eyes are on a TAXI parked in the roadhouse lot.

INT. TAXI - MOVING - NIGHT

Caroline looks like a drenched rat, slumped to the window. A CABDRIVER looks her over, and the footlocker she clutches:

CABDRIVER
Hey there. Whatcha got there?

CAROLINE
Proof.

EXT. GARDEN DISTRICT ROWHOUSE - NIGHT

A DOOR OPENS to reveal Luke in jeans and "LSU" T-shirt. He's stunned to see Caroline there, shivering and pale--

LUKE
Jesus Christ, what the--

CAROLINE
She tried to kill me.

INT. LUKE'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Caroline pushes her way in, dropping the footlocker and falling to her knees--

CAROLINE
She knows I know, she knows I know --
and Ben, he's still at the house!

Caroline overturns the footlocker -- spilling the evidence: hair, pills, records...and the bedsheet reading "HELP ME."

Luke reads the fear in her eyes. And knows it's true.

CAROLINE
Call the police! I left him, we've gotta get back out there--

LUKE
The hell we do!

CAROLINE
I left him there!

Luke grabs her shoulders, trying to get through to her--

LUKE
You didn't leave anyone.
(she finally calms)
Look, slow down and tell me what happened. What do you mean, she tried to kill you?

His CELL PHONE rings, startling them. They trade a wary look...as Luke picks up.

LUKE
Luke Marshall.
(swallows hard)
Mrs. Devereaux, to what do I...

Caroline scrambles upright on the couch. Luke stills her:

LUKE
Heard from Caroline? Why would I have...what's going on?

He holds up a finger to Caroline, then runs to a desk. Opens a drawer and pulls a mini-tape recorder. He hits "Record," puts it to the receiver by his ear:

LUKE
Wait, Violet, start from the beginning. What happened tonight?

He pulls the recorder back -- it's not turning. He opens up the back -- no batteries inside--

LUKE
Hang on, hang on, one second--
(low, to Caroline)
We need to get this--

He rifles the drawer again, then hustles to the kitchen, opening drawers there, then into the back bedroom--

LUKE (O.S.)
Hurting Ben? Hurting him how?

Caroline sits alone, shivering. Then notes Luke's stereo is faintly playing...blues music. She steps to it, sees a whole collection of old blues CD's beside his desk--

--which has PHOTOS of Luke with a girlfriend, with parents, in a graduation gown. The books on the desk have titles like "Fundamentals of Estate Law," "The Law for Beginners," "Basic Wills and Trusts." She raises an eyebrow--

LUKE (O.S.)
What do you mean, she "took" him?
What are you talking about?

--as beneath them, she catches a glimpse of her own photo. It's a "surveillance"-type shot, from when she first arrived at the house. She shoves the books aside to see more--

--and KNOCKS OVER a glass of water, which spills into the desk's middle drawer -- which Caroline opens on instinct--

--to see JARS of HERBS and POWDERS. A jar of WISHBONES, a SWEETENING GLOVE, FINGERNAILS, HAIR...and a familiar snake's head RUBY RING...

Caroline's chilled. She swiftly rifles the drawer--

LUKE (O.S.)
Well, look, if I do hear from her, what do you want me to say?

--as over her shoulder, Luke steps into silhouetted view in his bedroom doorway, without the phone--

--as Caroline lifts up a broken piece, all but the tip--

--of a skeleton key.

And over her shoulder, Luke MARCHES toward her. She doesn't see him, doesn't hear him, so focused on the key--

--that the first danger she senses is the CORD AROUND HER THROAT. Pulled tight in an instant -- and back--

--jerking her backward off her feet! The wind's knocked from her and before she can recover--

CAROLINE'S POV

--an upside-down Luke SLAMS her head to the floor--

LUKE
Goodnight, child.

--and into DARKNESS.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. FLOODED LANDSCAPE - MOVING - NIGHT

Black and rippling water, trees emerging from it. Whether bayou swamp or newly-flooded land, it's impossible to tell. The HISS of a slick roadway. The rain has stopped.

INT. LUKE'S BRONCO

REVERSE to find Caroline's eyes opening, pressed to a window. She's lying prone in the passenger seat, hands bound behind her and gagged. With Luke at the wheel...

LUKE
Hell of a thing, isn't it? Everywhere you look. A whole new world all around you. It's like being born.
(considers)
Or dying. I wouldn't know.

EXT. DEVEREAUX HOUSE - NIGHT

The Bronco enters the now-open gate, edging past the stranded Civic, easily navigating the slightly-flooded drive...

...and approaches the house. Windows all lit with CANDLES.

EXT. FRONT OF HOUSE

Luke hauls Caroline from the Bronco to the steps. She resists him, so he yanks her hair back:

LUKE
Hush, Caroline. I know it's hard the way things turned out. But you will be helping. After all...it's what you were hired for.

INT. DEVEREAUX HOUSE

The door BANGS open as Luke drags Caroline in. The foyer is eerie and candlelit. Tall shadows flicker.

LUKE
Anyone home?

Violet appears at the top of the stairs with her flashlight and hunting rifle. She fixes both on Caroline:

VIOLET
He's missing. She's hidden him somewhere.

She descends the stairs as Luke removes Caroline's gag. She gasps for air, sputtering, on her knees--

LUKE
Where is he, Caroline?

She looks to Violet, shaking, with cruel understanding...

CAROLINE
It wasn't him, it was me...
(horrified)
You want to sacrifice me...

LUKE
WHERE IS HE?

CAROLINE
Why are you helping her...?

Luke flickers a conflicted glance. Then to Violet:

LUKE
Is everything ready?

VIOLET
I can't start until I know where he is. What's our tale if he gets away?

She hands Luke the rifle and drops to a knee, gripping Caroline's hair -- her grandmotherly smile no more:

VIOLET
You will tell me where my husband is...because he's as your father was. There's nothing you can do to help him. So there's no need to even try.

Caroline's trembling -- a tear streaks her face. She looks away, down the hall. At the end is the door to her room.

She stares for a long moment.

Then something registers in her face. She seems to subtly strengthen. And she meets Violet's stare head-on.

CAROLINE
He's in the garden. The shed.

VIOLET
(to Luke)
Don't scratch her up any more than she already is.

She goes out the front door. Alone with Luke, Caroline manages to struggle to her feet--

CAROLINE
She's teaching you, isn't she. You help her kill me and she'll teach you how. Ben knew, didn't he...

LUKE
That's enough, Caroline--

CAROLINE
You gonna shoot me? Shoot me.

LUKE
(raises the rifle)
Stop right there, Caroline.

CAROLINE
I want my father's picture...

She stumbles forward, leaning against the wall as she ignores him, headed for her bedroom.

CAROLINE
I want him with me...

She keeps going, and Luke lowers the rifle. He allows her onward...and stays several steps behind.

EXT. YARD/INT. GARDEN SHED - SAME

Violet SPLASHES across the lawn, reaching the shed--

--and forcing the door open. There's two feet of standing water, floating tools...and above, a FIGURE under a tarp.

VIOLET
Well, now. There you are.

She throws the tarp aside--

--just as GARDEN SHEARS come flashing at her -- and she GRABS BEN'S WRIST in the nick of time, leaving the points mere inches from her face!

Violet twists his arm; the shears drop. Poor Ben stares with desperate eyes -- wet and shivering. Violet tut-tuts:

VIOLET
Oh you poor, poor soul.

INT. LOWER HALL/CAROLINE'S ROOM - SAME

Caroline struggles onward, bracing with the wall, hands bound behind her. She's almost to the door when Luke grabs her--

LUKE
Look, you stay here. You want the picture? I'll get the damn picture--

--and as he steps past and puts a foot to her room's threshold, he stops. He gets a strange look...as he looks down...and then turns back toward Caroline...

CAROLINE
And no one who means me harm can cross it.

And as Luke's eyes widen, Caroline BURSTS into movement--

--darting right at him before he can raise the rifle -- and scampering through the doorway! Luke tries to grab her but snatches air--

And she's inside! He flails with a hand, refusing (or unable) to take a step across the threshold--

--so he raises the rifle instead, as she SLAMS against the door with her back, driving it SHUT! She grabs her skeleton key off the dresser -- locks the door with her bound hands--

INT. HALLWAY

--while Luke aims the rifle at the lock! CLICK. Luke frowns, cracks the stock. It's not loaded.

INT. CAROLINE'S ROOM

Caroline tumbles over the bed, leaps to her windowsill--

INT. HALLWAY

--as Luke SLAMS against the door, hearing GLASS SHATTER--

LUKE
She's outside--
(calling)
VIOLET! SHE'S OUTSIDE!

EXT. YARD/GARDEN SHED

Violet BURSTS from the shed -- seeing Caroline outside the shattered window, sawing her bonds with a GLASS SHARD--

VIOLET
CAROLINE!

--and splitting them! Caroline darts from sight, hands now free. Violet sprints after her, feet splashing--

EXT. FRONT OF HOUSE

--as Luke SPRINTS out, rifle held, around the side--

EXT. BACK OF HOUSE

--as Caroline CLIMBS the lattice onto the sunporch roof and then RIPS the lattice free. She SMASHES an upstairs window as Violet and Luke converge below--

VIOLET
She's -- why's she--
(realizes, to Luke)
GET BACK INSIDE!

INT. VIOLET'S ROOM

Caroline BURSTS in and flings open the closet. To find the Mason jars full of BRICK DUST.

INT. FRONT FOYER - SECONDS LATER

A TRAIL OF BRICK DUST comes spilling across the front doorway -- just as the door FLIES OPEN!

Caroline leaps back, a Mason jar in her red-stained hand -- to see Luke staring at the dust-line like it's the plague--

LUKE
SHE'S DONE THE DOOR!

Caroline spins to the flanking windows, scattering a handful of brick dust there too--

Luke sees, and immediately races sideways, out of sight--

As Caroline scatters another handful across the door to the main hall--

--as a WINDOW SHATTERS somewhere in that direction--

--while Caroline scatters a line across the doorways to the dining room, and to the living room, effectively "sealing" off the foyer -- then sprints up the staircase--

--as Luke darts into view from a room halfway down the main hall. He rushes to the foyer threshold, stops still at the dust-line, watching her escape--

LUKE
I CAN'T GET TO THE STAIRS!

INT. UPPER HALL

Caroline CHARGES to the top landing, racing to the far end, scattering dust across Ben's doorway, Violet's doorway--

--as there's another WINDOW SHATTER -- upstairs--

--and Caroline scatters a line at the next door, and the next, the jar running out, she's nearing the bottom -- just a couple last doors to go--

AS ONE OF THEM FLIES OPEN

--as Caroline's bent before it. Violet charges out, knocking Caroline backwards and sending the Mason jar flying over the railing to SHATTER in the foyer below--

--as Violet snatches hold, twisting Caroline's hair--

VIOLET
Try to use my conjures on ME?!

--as she BLOWS a handful of BLACK POWDER right in her face. Caroline's blinded, eyes stinging as Violet attacks--

--and Caroline spins, sending them both crashing into a side table. A corded phone hits the floor. They pivot off, stumbling to the stairs just as Caroline finds leverage--

--and rips herself free with an enraged CRY, leaving Violet unbalanced, at the stairs' edge--

--as the old woman pinwheels and FALLS BACKWARDS. She SLAMS the steps, somersaulting over, smacking off the wall as the stairs curve to the foyer--

--and landing violently, her legs broken at nasty angles.

LUKE
NO!!!

Her vision BLURRING, Caroline sees Luke stuck in a foyer doorway, rifle in hand. He darts from sight...as there's a low MOAN from Violet's crumpled figure.

Caroline wipes her eyes, coughing up black powder. She spins, shaking...backed against the attic stairwell's door.

INT. SPIRAL STAIRWELL

Caroline darts in, pulling the corded phone from the hall's end table. She locks the door. The cord runs beneath--

--as she sits on the dim-lit stairs and dials 911.

911 OPERATOR (O.S.)
9-1-1 Emergency.

There's a mechanical CLUNK and a HUM. It's the motor of the staircase wheelchair lift. Ascending...

CAROLINE
Please, my name is Caroline Ellis, I need police and paramedics, I'm at 1750 Bayou Chapelet in Terrebonne Parish. There's people hurt here! We're trapped here! Hurry!

She hangs up, eyes still stinging, then pounds in another number. The mechanical HUM is getting closer--

JILL'S VOICE (O.S.)
Unnnh...what time is it?

CAROLINE
Jill, I'm in trouble, I'm in the house! It's real, it's all real--

JILL'S VOICE
Cary? You're where, what?

CAROLINE
I'm in the Devereaux house!

Jill's reply gets lost as the line goes DEAD. Caroline pulls at the phone -- the cord's severed end slips under the door.

There's a THUMP against the door. Caroline jumps--

VIOLET (O.S.)
Carrrroline...

Weary, but still strong. Caroline scrambles further up--

VIOLET (O.S.)
Carrrroline...

INT. ATTIC

--as Caroline rushes in and...stops dead in her tracks.

The attic is now ILLUMINATED by A HUNDRED BLACK CANDLES around the room's perimeter. Furniture has been moved aside to create a large open center. And a DOZEN MIRRORS hang on the walls, ringing the flickering macabre glow.

Her vision BLURS again...as there's the sound of a DRUMBEAT. Distant, but pulsing. Music we've heard before.

CAROLINE
Oh God no...

INT. BEN'S ROOM

A MAN'S HAND wearing Justify's snake-head RUBY RING moves away from Ben's spinning phonograph...to reveal LUKE, setting a familiar album sleeve aside.

It's the "Conjure of Sacrifice."

INT. ATTIC

The MUSIC BUILDS -- clapping joins the drumbeat, the rattling gourd, the washboard and the woman's soulful humming--

--as the lower stairwell door is heard OPEN and SHUT. Caroline immediately shuts and locks the upper door. She backs away, desperate and trembling, as she hears--

FEMALE SINGER (ON RECORD)
Lawdy lawd, come to free my soul--

CHORUS (ON RECORD)
Lawdy lawd, come to free my soul--

SINGER
Lawdy lawd, let the good times roll--

CHORUS
Lawdy lawd, let the good times roll--

Caroline runs the only way she can, to the Hoodoo Room--

SINGER
Rattlesnake, rattlesnake, shed that skin--

CHORUS
Rattlesnake, rattlesnake, shed that skin--

--fumbling with the key to unlock it and enter--

SINGER
Split me open, let the lawd roll in--

CHORUS
Split me open, let the lawd roll in--

INT. HOODOO ROOM

Caroline charges in. She tries to climb to the slatted roof-grate, banging and clawing at it to no avail--

CAROLINE
HELP ME! SOMEBODY HELP ME!

--and then, in desperation, pulls out the parchment still in her pocket: Violet's "Conjure of Supreme Protection." She struggles -- her vision DOUBLING -- to read the diagram--

CAROLINE
Chalk, sawdust, blood, hair -- chalk, sawdust, blood, hair--

--and rifles the rolltop desk, finding a jar of BROWN SAWDUST, sticks of GOLD CHALK, and a jewel-handled KNIFE--

As the music's call-and-response picks up the pace--

SINGER AND CHORUS
Rollllll on! *Rollllll on*! Rollllll on! *Rollllll on*! Roll! *Roll*! Roll! *Roll*! Roll! *Roll*! Roll! *Roll*!

--Caroline grabs a red candle and scampers back out, knocking over the 1912 picture of Papa Justify and Mama Cecile, with the redheaded Thorpe children--

INT. ATTIC

--to drop to her knees on the floor. She lights the red candle, puts the conjure instructions beside it--

--which depict a pair of concentric circles, "eyes" drawn at the compass points, chalk lines radiating from the center and blood, hair and sawdust filling the outer ring--

--so Caroline copies it, drawing two CHALK CIRCLES around her, then slashing lines and drawing eyes--

WOMAN AND CHORUS (O.S.)
Roll! Roll! Roll! Roll!

--as the male guttural CHANTING joins the music. And the female wordless WAIL, changing pitch, building steadily--

--as a shadow blocks the light beneath the attic door--

--and Caroline spreads the brown sawdust around her, then taking the knife to her hair--

CAROLINE
Protect me, protect me, protect me--

--and hacking off the ends, spreading them with the sawdust and then bringing the knife to her left forearm--

--slicing a long surface cut to DRAW BLOOD--

--as the MUSIC builds faster and faster, the wail a SHRIEK--

--as the attic door FLIES OPEN!

And the music goes SILENT.

Out of the shadows, a FIGURE CRAWLS into view. It's Violet, on her elbows, dragging her twisted lower torso. She's now wearing Mama Cecile's BONE AMULET necklace...

VIOLET
Why, child. I believe you broke both my legs.

Caroline smears her blood around the circle, waving the knife and parchment defensively--

CAROLINE
You can't touch me. You can't come near me. See this? It's your Conjure of Protection.

VIOLET
Is that what that is now...

The old woman's smile turns wicked:

VIOLET
And just who gave you that?

Slowly, so slowly...Caroline stills...staring at her self-drawn circle with horror...

VIOLET
All that circle protects is you...from leaving it.

...and as Caroline takes in the room, we should notice that *it looks exactly the same as in the 1912 flashback, where the servants were found conjuring with the Thorpe children...*

...while Violet pulls the ornate OVAL DRESSING MIRROR from behind a cabinet. It's on wheels, gilt and ornamental.

VIOLET
We've been waiting for you, child. To believe.

Caroline faces her own scared reflection, as it BLURS and DOUBLES (the black powder at work). Violet uses the mirror for leverage, standing tall despite her broken legs--

VIOLET
It doesn't work if you don't believe.

CAROLINE
But I...I don't believe...I <u>don't</u> believe...

VIOLET
Ohh. I think you do.

The MUSIC has resumed, DRUMBEAT building, CHANTING returning, many voices now, speaking in tongues, chanting faster--

--as Violet TURNS the mirror on its swivel, so that the backing faces Caroline and the mirrored side faces her -- with her body pressed flush, clutching it tightly to her--

INT. UPPER HALL

Luke carries a BLACK CANDLE, his ruby ring in view, eyes closed. He steps solemnly toward the attic, trance-like--

LUKE
...the weakness is the flesh, the flesh, the flesh...

INT. ATTIC

Violet's obscured, BODY SHAKING, quaking the mirror, as Caroline waves the knife desperately, still inside her own chalk circle, terrified--

CAROLINE
Stay back, I'll kill you, stay away--

INT. UPPER HALL

Luke stalks closer, eyes shut, candle held, MUSIC louder...

LUKE
...the frailty is the coil, the coil, the coil...

INT. ATTIC

Behind the mirror, Violet's SPASMING UNCONTROLLABLY. And now the very room starts to SHAKE -- other furniture, the hanging mirrors on the walls, the candles--

CAROLINE
(now shuts her eyes)
I don't believe, I don't believe, I don't believe, I don't believe--

INT. UPPER HALL

As Luke reaches the attic stairway, bathed in sweat--

LUKE
...the flesh, the coil, the flesh, the coil, the frail, the weak, the weak...

--as his chant builds to an unintelligible PRIMITIVE CRY as he raises the candle high CAUSING IT TO FLARE--

INT. ATTIC

CAROLINE
I DON'T BELIEVE!!!

As a bone-curdling SCREAM erupts from behind the mirror and Violet JERKS BACKWARDS, hitting the floor--

--sending the MIRROR FORWARD, rolling across the floor and pivoting over as it does -- to now reveal the mirrored side--

--except instead of Caroline's reflection, it's Violet--

AS HER REFLECTED IMAGE CHANGES

BLURRING and DOUBLING, like an induced hallucination...and then back to Violet's image again...as before our eyes, Violet (in the mirror) DE-AGES, a woman of seventy-one, then of forty-five, of twenty-eight--

--like history itself is hurtling backwards...as the mirror ROLLS closer and closer and now--

IN THE MIRROR, VIOLET VANISHES

replaced by a RED-HAIRED WOMAN of fifty-five, then of forty, of twenty -- like snapshots melting impossibly fast--

--until the reflected image is now the REDHEADED GIRL we've seen before. Little Grace Thorpe from the 1912 flashbacks.

AS SHE VANISHES TOO

replaced by a woman we've seen before. An African-American woman. A conjure woman. In a familiar maid's outfit.

It's MAMA CECILE. And the victorious cry is hers--

--as the MIRROR COMES CRASHING into Caroline's hallucinatory, horrified stare and then SHATTERS, throwing her backwards at full force, just as the MUSIC and CANDLES all blow out!

And the dark room falls silent.

SMASH CUT TO:

BLACKNESS.

FADE IN:

EXT. DEVEREAUX HOUSE - NIGHT

The dark house LIGHTS UP, room by room, as the electricity sputters back on.

INT. ATTIC

The wall sconces COME ON for the first time, illuminating the space. The mirrors are now cracked, bubbled and warped. It's like a storm blew through.

Caroline lies crumpled on the floor, in sawdust, glass shards and grime. She stirs, struggles up. She blinks to clear the cobwebs, checks her body for wounds.

Then sees Violet lying face-down by the stairway door. Motionless.

Caroline gets to her feet, wincing. She limps to Violet, kneels beside her...

...and snares a CIGARETTE peeking out of Violet's pocket. Violet's lighter is on the floor. Caroline flicks it alight:

CAROLINE
Thank you, child.

And takes a good long smoke.

LUKE (O.S.)
Cecile?! You all right, Cecile!?

Luke arrives in the doorway, surveys the scene. Caroline stands, nods to the motionless old woman:

CAROLINE
I'm fine now, Justify.

Luke nods, relieved, and follows her gaze to Violet's body:

LUKE
A fair bit harder than the lawyer, wasn't she.

CAROLINE
It's harder every time. They don't believe like they used to. You gotta get 'em riled up.

She surveys a mirror on the wall, regarding her own body, as if she's trying on a new outfit--

CAROLINE
Told you I wanted a black one, Justify.

LUKE
The black ones wouldn't stay. Beggars can't be choosers.

CAROLINE
Hmmph.

Luke approaches from behind, puts his arms around her--

LUKE
I think it fits you beautifully.
Better than Violet, or even Grace.
(smiles)
We'll get used to them. We always do.

On the floor, Violet now stirs. Disoriented, she regards her body, aghast to recognize the broken legs. Raises trembling arms. And feels the contours of her face.

She stares at Caroline in shock...as the girl approaches...

CAROLINE
What folks don't understand 'bout sacrifice, child...is it don't always mean dying.
(beat)
Sometimes it's more of a trade.

Violet's agape. Caroline smiles. Violet's shaking, her dry mouth cracking open, her liver-spotted arms--

VIOLET
Gggg....gggg...gemeot...gemeotof...
(swallows, stronger)
Getmotofere...get me out of here...!
GET ME OUT OF HERE!

Her eyes well up, her face full of horror--

CAROLINE
I know, child. I know.

EXT. DEVEREAUX HOUSE - DAWN

Jill drives up the waterlogged drive to the house, passing Caroline's damaged Civic with a worried look--

--and reaching the house to find two POLICE CARS and an AMBULANCE already there.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Violet lies on a gurney, legs immobilized and staring into space. Her arms have slight tremors, her eyes dart with paranoid helplessness -- just like Ben.

CAROLINE (O.S.)
We thought it was just a fall, but now she can't move or even speak. It's like it triggered, I don't know--

LUKE (O.S.)
Like a stroke or something--

REVEAL Jill hurrying through the doorway to find Caroline and Luke talking with two PARAMEDICS, beside Violet--

JILL
Cary!

She runs over -- as Caroline turns, confused--

CAROLINE
Dearie me. I'm sorry, are you with the police?

JILL
What? It's me. You called me.

Violet's eyes widen to see Jill, she gives a choked MOAN--

CAROLINE
I called you?

JILL
For help. Don't you remember?

LUKE
(offers a swift hand)
Cary's not herself right now -- I'm Luke Marshall, the Devereaux's lawyer.

JILL
I...hi, Jill Dupay, her roommate--

CAROLINE
Jill! Yes, I did call. Fiddlesticks! I don't know what possessed me--

JILL
Hey, I'm here, it's all right.

CAROLINE
They'll need real care now, they can't stay here. This is all my fault--

JILL
(arms around her)
Cary, no it's not. It's not.

Caroline calms, in Jill's embrace, watching the Paramedics give shaking Violet a sedative injection...

PARAMEDIC
(to his partner)
C'mon, let's move her in with her husband. And keep that mirror away from her, wouldya? -- she goes nuts when she sees that thing...

As the Paramedics roll Violet out, Caroline offers a small -- even grateful -- smile. Then breaks Jill's hug.

CAROLINE
Someone should ride to the hospital with them. Maybe...Jill -- would you mind? And we'll meet you?

JILL
Of course, whatever you need. Why, what are you gonna do?

Caroline shrugs dazedly. Looks to Luke.

CAROLINE
Just keep living.

She touches his hand and departs, toward the police. Confused, Jill surveys the room...seeing scattered red dust--

LUKE
She meant so much to them -- her being here. I know it wasn't for long...but they loved her...

JILL
Why do you say that?

LUKE
(a confidential smile)
In their wills? They're leaving her the house.

INT. AMBULANCE - DAY

Violet's gurney gets LOADED in, rolling to a stop...right beside Ben's. Violet turns her sad eyes...

...to meet Ben's. There's understanding there now.

SHADOWS enter the ambulance. Doors shut, engine REVS. And as Violet struggles...to reach a trembling hand...

INT. LIVING ROOM

WE SEE PICTURES on a mantel. As ANGLE SLIDES from left to right...starting on a 1906 wedding photo of Papa Justify and Mama Cecile. Next, the 1912 photo of Justify and Cecile with the two Thorpe children, Martin and Grace...

INT. BATHROOM

...while Luke hangs a MIRROR back in place...

INT. AMBULANCE

...and Violet's hand reaches, straining with all she can...

INT. LIVING ROOM

TRACKING PAST PHOTOS...of redheaded Martin and Grace Thorpe as teens, holding hands. Then in middle-age (50's), arm-in-arm -- shaking hands with a smiling young Ben and Violet (20's), beside a 1962 "Sold" sign at the Devereaux house.

Then, a photo of elderly Ben and Violet, cheek-to-cheek...

INT. DINING ROOM

...while Caroline re-hangs a sideboard MIRROR...

INT. AMBULANCE

...and Violet's trembling hand is still desperate to grasp...

INT. LIVING ROOM

ENDING THE TRACK...on Luke's graduation photo and the photo of young Caroline with her father. As a hand sets down Caroline's guitar-shaped key chain: *Live Fast, Die Young*...

INT. AMBULANCE

...as Violet's hand clutches Ben's, reaching out from his gurney. They clasp and hold on tight.

Sitting by the door, Jill and a Paramedic look on, witness to two elderly faces lost in each other, hand-in-hand:

PARAMEDIC
Man. I hope I never grow that old.

JILL
Yeah? Well, take a look at them.
Nothing wrong with growing old.
(beat)
Long as you're together.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Where the TWO HANDS CLASPED are Caroline's and Luke's. They're kissing, a tender kiss, both familiar and new...

...in a room with all its mirrors now re-hung...beneath a prominent FRAMED PORTRAIT of Papa Justify and Mama Cecile...

...as ANGLE PULLS AWAY, out the window, leaving them there...

...two young bodies in love...

EXT. DEVEREAUX HOUSE

...in the home they've always known...

...as ANGLE RISES, moving into the swamp..into the mossy oaks, past the hanging tree...

...and as the ambulance disappears down a distant road...we ASCEND high above the bayou and into the Southern sky...

...all mortal cares left far below.

CUT TO BLACK.